







**PLAYS OF  
DEMOCRACY**

By MARGARET MAYORGA

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE  
AMERICAN DRAMA

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REPRESENTATIVE ONE-ACT PLAYS  
BY AMERICAN AUTHORS

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THE BEST ONE-ACT  
PLAYS OF 1937

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THE BEST ONE-ACT  
PLAYS OF 1938

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THE BEST ONE-ACT  
PLAYS OF 1939

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THE BEST ONE-ACT  
PLAYS OF 1940

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THE BEST ONE-ACT  
PLAYS OF 1941

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THE BEST ONE-ACT  
PLAYS OF 1942

# PLAYS OF DEMOCRACY

Edited by  
MARGARET MAYORGA



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## PREFACE

It was many months before Pearl Harbor that Dodd Mead and I conceived what we thought was a very good idea: we would publish a book of plays about modern democracy—not historical baggage, with which schools were already burdened; not propaganda; but plays showing the various points of view of our democratic way of life in dramatic contrast. After more than two years of prospecting, we still think it a grand idea.

Since we planned it, the publishers have aged perceptibly, and I am graying; in fact, certain partners have become as bald as the feathered emblem of our democracy is generally supposed to be. With deep respect for integrity all around, we have not been able to resolve the meaning of that word "democracy." Authors have been plainly embarrassed by it; they have sent us plays with notations, "Is this the sort of thing you mean?" And almost a hundred times out of a hundred we have reluctantly written back, "Thank you, no." The Librarian of Congress tried to steer us clear from the beginning; he said, "I haven't any such play, and I don't know of any." But usually at about the time someone makes a comprehensive remark like that, something turns up to challenge the hope that lies eternal in the human breast.

It was the entrance of America into the war, however, which simplified our editorial task finally. Hard as it is to fight for democracy, it is still easier to fight for something than to comprehend it. With the attention of Americans focused on the four freedoms and on home-front activities, and with schools and community groups needing plays for practical educational purposes, it became possible for authors to write plays for this volume. But still it has been no simple

## PREFACE

task, high school taboos being what they have come to be, in war ~~or out~~ of it.

If only all high school taboos were alike, editorial matters would eventually resolve themselves, but happily for our democracy this is not the case; different sections of the country react differently to identical matters and the task of finding the best plays for the greatest number of adherents is something of a game. I discovered some of the rules of this game when recommending in a well-known magazine a series of plays suitable for high schools; the first question usually asked me by a careful teacher whose approval I sought was not the logical one, "Is it a good play?" but a completely irrelevant one, "Nobody becomes pregnant in it?" Fortunately I believe the authors have managed to slip a few pregnant ideas into these **PLAYS OF DEMOCRACY**. I hope so.

In fact, I hope the time is near when all such false educational taboos and all mental fears will be looked on as the enemies of human understanding that they really are, for they look as silly as sacred cows to other nationalities. It takes courage—and is not always pleasant—to grow up to democracy, because it is never possible to be a good democrat according to one's own standards exclusively.

I am sure even the greatest of the authors whose little plays are offered here would approve my saying that their sincere contributions are modest offerings in the great cause of helping people to understand each other. Democracy has been touted far and wide—we all applaud the good word—but while we are trying to achieve it, most of us would settle for a little more gentle good will each day. Perhaps that may be what democracy really is, and possibly these plays do suggest a way or two that we may practise it.

MARGARET MAYORGA

Long Island, 1943

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to amateurs providing regulations stated  
on each title page are complied with:**

**CLARION CALL  
HAYM SALOMON  
CONFAB WITH CROCKETT  
CEILING  
MOONSET  
A VISIT FROM AUNT HARRIET  
HENRY WALLACE'S EXPERIMENT**

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**THE BALLAD OF VALLEY FORGE  
AMERICAN SAINT OF DEMOCRACY  
THE CRITICAL YEAR  
THE CAVE  
WHERE BUT IN AMERICA  
JOHNNY'S LITTLE LAMB  
THE REFUGEE  
YOUNG LINCOLN**



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# THE BALLAD OF VALLEY FORGE

By

ALFRED KREYMBORG

With music by Alex North

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# THE BALLAD OF VALLEY FORGE

## CHARACTERS

*A* POLICEMAN *or* NARRATOR

SAM MEMORY, *a rider from the past*

NEIGHBORS GREEN *and* GRAY *and other townspeople*

CHAIRMAN *of townhall meeting*

BALLAD SINGER *and* CHORUS

# THE BALLAD OF VALLEY FORGE

## SCENE I

*Painted drop of a street scene most anywhere in America on a wintry night. Townspeople going by as if they were shadows on a screen, each bending forward at an angle against the gale. And their chins so deep in coat-collars we cannot hear what they say, except for a mumbling undercurrent. Happily the cop on the corner, beating his arms to keep warm, gives us some idea as to where we are and what's up, and like a Greek messenger, speaks to himself and the audience, if any there be. With the beating of arms and fairly rhythmic speech, he seems to warm up by degrees; or his voice does. . . .*

POLICEMAN. Gosh, what a gale this is tonight and a blizzard! It reminds me of Valley Forge. An' Main Street is buried white an' the people look like ghosts sailin' along. Quite a few people too an' mostly old gaffers. An' all sailin' in one direction, the old townhall where the meetin's are. [*Chorus: "We're on our way to Liberty Hall, Liberty Hall, Liberty Hall . . ." The POLICEMAN chuckles.*] What do they expect to meet there, a *real* ghost? [*Chorus, off-stage: ". . . Liberty Hall, Liberty Hall . . ."*] Well, there's one thing real tonight an' that's what they *feel*. This is Washington's Birthday. Here come two gaffers shakin' hands in the snow an' then . . . [*Winking.*] I could do with a nip if nobody minds an' warm up my gizzard again! [*He goes to the side entrance of the corner café and vanishes. . . .*]

GRAY. Hello, Neighbor Green—

GREEN. Hello, Neighbor Gray—

GRAY. Where are you bound for?—

GREEN. Liberty Hall.

GRAY. Mind if I join you?

GREEN. Not at all.

[*With the aid of their canes and friendly arms they move along.*]

GRAY. It sure is blowin' tonight—

GREEN. Yes, just like the Japs a year ago.

GRAY. An' just like us from now on!

GREEN. I saw my grandson off today.

GRAY. Cheer up, Man, he'll be back.

GREEN. Oh, I'm cheerful, Neighbor Gray. I envy the lad—

GRAY. So would I if I had one to give.

[*Pause. Blowing of noses.*]

GREEN. They tell me this bird that's speakin' tonight's a sensation. Goes ridin' all over the nation.

GRAY. What do they call him?

GREEN. Sam Memory.

GRAY. Was he born with such a name?

GREEN. Search me, I dunno.

GRAY. They tell me there's ballad singin' too.

GREEN. Yes, an' I never miss that.

GRAY. From the looks o' things there's quite a few of the old guard turnin' out.

GREEN. They remember Pearl Harbor—

GRAY. An' Wake Island too!

[*Other greetings from other voices.*]

VOICES. Hello, Neighbor Brown, Neighbor Jones—

Hello, Neighbor Smith, Neighbor Cohen—

Hello, Tony, Schulz, and La Salle—

CHORUS. And here we all are at Liberty Hall!

## SCENE II

*Voices fade out and the townhall meeting fades in, as the painted drop rises. Quite a tumult. CHAIRMAN'S gavel pounding.*

CHAIRMAN. Order, gentlemen, order!

GRAY. Yeh—but how much longer do we have to wait?

GREEN. That bird's a half hour late—

GRAY. He must be comin' by slow freight!

[*Laughter.*]

CHAIRMAN. [*Pounding.*] I've already told you fellers I engaged that speaker myself. He's a busy man—

GREEN. But so are we, Mr. Chairman.

GRAY. Perhaps he's lost his memory.

CHAIRMAN. That'll do, Neighbor Gray. This is no time for levity. [*The sound of horse's hoofs.*] That must be him right now!

GREEN. But what's he doin' on a horse?

GRAY. Has he run out o' gas?

GREEN. Or run into the rubber shortage?

[*Laughter.*]

OTHERS. Maybe he's Paul Revere!

CHAIRMAN. Order, gentlemen, order!

[*Commotion in the rear.*]

SINGLE VOICES. [*In rising awe.*] For the land's sake! What is this, a joke? Or a masquerade?

CHAIRMAN. Quiet, neighbors. Step forward, sir.

[*A youthful voice begins—*]

MEMORY. Sorry I'm late, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN. Are you Sam Memory?

MEMORY. I am, sir.

CHAIRMAN. But you look young, so weary. An' what's that you're wearin'?

MEMORY. My uniform.

CHAIRMAN. I've seen that in the picture books. It's tattered an' old.

MEMORY. As old as America!

CHORUS. Gosh!

MEMORY. Remember the Revolution?

CHORUS. Yes!!

MEMORY. This is the suit we farmers wore.

CHAIRMAN. [*Solemnly.*] Then you must have returned from the dead!

MEMORY. [*Quietly.*] No, I'm alive. They shot me at Yorktown but I'm alive.

[*Rising murmurs.*]

GREEN. Gosh, he's a ghost!

GRAY. An' he's lost one arm!

CHORUS. Where's the other?

CHAIRMAN. Quiet, gentlemen, please. I know you're surprised. But give our friend a chance to explain.

MEMORY. [*Laughing a little.*] We surprised the Britishers too. At Lexington, Concord, Bunker Hill.

CHORUS. [*Laughing as well.*] Lexington, Concord, Bunker Hill?

MEMORY. Do I need any further introduction?

CHAIRMAN. [*Heartily.*] No, Mr. Memory—

CHORUS. The floor's all yours!

[*Scraping of chairs and then quiet.*]

MEMORY. [*Simply and soberly.*] Well, Mr. Chairman and members of Liberty Hall: I come to address you now in the name of your forefathers. And in the name of that great leader who's not unknown to you.

CHORUS. Washington?

MEMORY. Yes, George Washington. And I come to you tonight in the dead of winter, as I have all over the land, to revive *your* memories—

CHAIRMAN. Go on, sir—

CHORUS. Go on!

MEMORY. And to remind you not alone of the Revolution, but of other great crises that threatened the land with annihilation.

MOUNTING VOICES. Yes, the Civil War! Yes, an' remember the Maine! Yes, an' the first World War! An' Pearl Harbor—

CHORUS. Pearl Harbor!

MEMORY. And how did everyone answer that blow in the dark? Did you all rise together?

[*Confused murmurs and answers one at a time.*]

VOICES. No, not altogether. Some came faster than others, others were slow. Some of us never woke up, not even after Wake Island. But we got together in time. Just look at us now!

MEMORY. [*Tenderly.*] I see, I see. Then you had your troubles too?

CHORUS. Yes, Mr. Memory.

[*Hushed pause.*]

MEMORY. [*Cheerfully.*] Well, fellow-members, don't look so downcast. That's how it was in the old days too. At Valley Forge—

CHORUS. Valley Forge?

CHAIRMAN. [*Eagerly.*] An' what united you then?

MEMORY. One man fought for us all and united the blind through his own will.

CHORUS. [*Softly.*] Washington—yes, George Washington.

MEMORY. And now, my friends, one thing is certain in case you don't quite remember. If he hadn't been there I wouldn't be here and you wouldn't be here either. Except in chains—or a colony still—or the colonies disunited.

[*Anxious pause.*]

CHAIRMAN. Go ahead, young man—

CHORUS. We're with you!

MEMORY. [*Factually.*] I was a minute man at Lexington. And a defender of Concord Bridge. And one of the frozen at Valley Forge—

CHAIRMAN. The heroes, you mean—

CHORUS. The heroes!

MEMORY. [*Solemnly, like a chanting march.*]

We had nothing to sleep in, not even blankets.

We had little to live on, not even bread.

We had nothing to hope for, not even freedom.

And little to pray to, the skies were black.

But one man was never defeated, though often defeated.  
And one man never deserted, though often betrayed.  
For he was a stone in the soul of steadfast action.  
And he was eternal flame encased in steel.

It was the worst of Decembers, that first December—  
The nineteenth day we dug in at Valley Forge.  
But we rallied around our leader and not even Death  
Could hold back the spring and the stream of our victory!

[*Commotion.*]

GREEN. That's how it is today—

CHORUS. We're winning too!

CHAIRMAN. Quiet, listen, listen!

MEMORY. [*Chanting again.*]

We were only ten thousand strong or ten thousand weak.  
And some of us had no pay before we died.  
And some of us grew too homesick for any war—  
And left great gaps in the wall we held before.

But not so the Leader who strode like a living tree.  
And not so the Leader who bled with the men who bled.  
And not so the Leader who stared into infinite space  
And saw past the winter the rise of our human race.

And you are what he visioned beyond the snow—

[CHORUS: Yes—]

And we are what he fashions wherever we go—

[CHORUS: Yes, yes—]

But where will we be tomorrow if one man fails?—

[CHORUS: Where, where?—]

At a broken bridge or the end of our human sails—

[CHORUS: No, No!]

[*Confused murmurs again. The gavel sounds and pounds louder,  
but to no avail.*]

CHAIRMAN. Order, gentlemen, order!

SINGLE VOICES. But *I* wanta make a speech. An' *I* wanta show Mr. Memory we're all fightin' now. Or sendin' our sons an' grandsons. Or workin' on farms an' factories. And our women too!

CHAIRMAN. Gentlemen, gentlemen—

GREEN. We're a hundred an' thirty million strong today.

GRAY. An' we all came out o' Valley Forge—

CHORUS. Wake Island, Bataan an' the Solomons!

CHAIRMAN. [*Shouting.*] Members of Liberty Hall! [*Voices subside.*] I know as sure as I stand here you know what your duties are—

GREEN. An' our actions too!

CHAIRMAN. But Memory's a busy lad—a man, I mean. He's got other folks as good as ourselves to address. But like the gale he came on he'll fly if we don't shut up. Ain't that so, Mr. Memory? [*Startled pause.*]

GRAY. Gosh, the lad's flown—

CHORUS. The man's flown!

CHAIRMAN. Lord, what happened, what happened?

CHORUS. Call him back!

CHAIRMAN. Sam Memory!

VOICES. Mr. Memory!

CHORUS. Memory—memory!

[*No answer—only the echoes and silence.*]

CHAIRMAN. He musta gone back to the grave—

SINGLE VOICES. No, we don't need him any more. We're all in his shoes. He's done his job an' now it's ours.

[*A new voice rises—*]

VOICE. All right then, you're ready to sing!

[*Pause and commotion again.*]

SINGLE VOICES. If it isn't our old Ballad Singer! Standin' where Memory stood before! Are you a spook too?

B.S. [*Laughing a little.*] No, I'm flesh and blood.

CHAIRMAN. But you look young now—like Memory's twin brother!

## THE BALLAD OF VALLEY FORGE

B.S. [*Quietly.*] Maybe I am, Mr. Chairman.

GREEN. An' his voice is just like the other—

GRAY. What's happened to you?

B.S. Nothing new, nothing old—I'm old *and* new.

CHAIRMAN. What do you mean, Ballad Singer?

B.S. Haven't you noticed anything missing that's on again?

[*Mounting amazement.*]

CHAIRMAN. You have *two* arms—he had *one*!

CHORUS. Yes, yes—

VOICES. Where did you get the other? Did you find it, Man?

B.S. [*Simply.*] I found my other arm in you. And my memory too.

[*Cheering, wild cheering.*]

CHAIRMAN. [*Pounding again.*] Quiet please, quiet, quiet! Mr. Memory's ready to sing—I mean our Ballad Singer—no, I mean—

CHORUS. [*Laughing.*] *What*, Mr. Chairman?

B.S. [*Triumphantly.*] He means *we*, he means *we*—

CHORUS. The singer's right!

CHAIRMAN. Yes, I mean *we*—*we*—

CHORUS. W—————e!

[*The SINGER begins the Ballad of Valley Forge, and the CHORUS joins in.*]

You could hear it through the day,  
 You could feel it in the night,  
 The way the winter sent the wind  
 To blind all human sight.  
 There was hardly any sky,  
 You could scarcely take to prayer  
 With ice along the ground  
 And no relief along the air.

The countryside, the Delaware,  
 Seemed to slip below:

The army torn to tatters  
And the human body snow.  
And worse than ice the hunger  
For a single loaf of bread  
To keep the heart from giving in  
And toppling toward the dead.

The disunited nation  
That was far too poor to pay  
The farmer who enlisted  
For a month or one more day  
Was now against the Leader  
Who commanded the retreat  
And strode among the stumbling shoes,  
The twenty thousand feet.

For Washington alone beheld  
The common soul on high  
And how the flesh of liberty  
Can fall but never die.  
And Washington alone in all  
The stricken race could feel  
The future and the past begin  
A lasting commonweal.

And where December dug the men  
And men dug in the snow  
To build a fortress for the spring  
And help the summer grow  
The South released a running stream  
And Nature gave her hand  
To every man at Valley Forge  
Who raised our native land.

You could hear it through the day,  
You could feel it in the night,

*THE BALLAD OF VALLEY FORGE*

The way the winter sent the wind  
To blind all human sight.  
There was hardly any sky,  
You could scarcely take to prayer  
With ice along the ground  
And no relief along the air.

But now the soul of Washington  
Is in the morning star.  
And every man who followed him  
Is in the men we are.  
For every step that died away  
Embraced a living grave:  
The vanguard of America,  
The blossoms of the brave.

And you were there and I was there  
And every father's son  
Was born in that white wilderness  
Beyond oblivion.  
And Valley Forge is in us all  
As winter strikes again—  
The twenty thousand living feet  
A hundred million men!

. . . . .

(The music for this ballad was composed by Private Alex North of the United States Army and may be obtained from the publishers, Edward B. Marks Music Corporation, 1250 Sixth Avenue, New York.)

CLARION CALL  
By  
HARRY WEINBERGER

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CLARION CALL

CHARACTERS

JOHN PETER ZENGER, *printer*

ANNA ZENGER, *his wife*

JAMES ALEXANDER, *a New York lawyer*

WILLIAM SMITH, *another New York lawyer*

ANDREW HAMILTON, *a lawyer from Philadelphia*

JURY FOREMAN

THE TIME: August 1735.

THE PLACE: New York City.

## CLARION CALL

### SCENE I

*The scene is a cell, with a barred window. There is a crudely-made table with two chairs drawn up to it, and a few crude stools here and there. Barred door down left. There is a pewter ink-pot, some large sheets of paper, an ink-sander, two or three quill pens and an unlighted tallow candle in a tin holder on the table. At rise, JOHN PETER ZENGER, his back to window, is sitting at the table writing with a large quill pen. His wife, ANNA, sits at right end of table watching him fondly. Her bonnet lies on the table before her. The late afternoon sun streams in through the barred windows.*

*ZENGER scratches away with the quill. ANNA sighs, picks up her bonnet and is tying the strings under her chin when ZENGER looks up and smiles at her fondly. She returns the smile.*

ZENGER. So soon? [*He resumes writing.*]

ANNA. Yes, John, it is nearly time. The little ones will be home from school shortly. [*She rises.*]

ZENGER. One moment. [*He signs article with a great flourish, sands ink and rises, holding sheet in both hands as he reads from it.*] “. . . without consent of the legislature and men of known estates denied their votes.” [*He smiles proudly and reads a line or two to himself.*] Now it is properly written.

ANNA. And it will be properly published in the next issue of our paper.

ZENGER. [*Folds it once and hands it to her.*] Do you take it, my dear. I trust you to get out *The New York Weekly Journal* as usual.

ANNA. [*Taking it.*] You know I will do so, John.

ZENGER. [*Taking her hand.*] Do the children speak of me?

ANNA. Always. [*Placing her hand over his.*] They miss you so.

ZENGER. When I realize that I cannot see them daily nor take part in their games, nor help them in the evening with their lessons in ciphering, my imprisonment does indeed seem a great hardship.

ANNA. Sometimes as we take our evening meal I fancy that I hear your footsteps coming up the walk and I hold my breath believing they have freed you.

ZENGER. I do much reading and writing. Yet the days and nights are so long . . . so long. . . . [*Starts pacing.*] If only my trial is called soon. For nine months, Anna . . . think of it! Nine months have I been in this cell.

ANNA. If you had but provided the bail Chief Justice Delancey demanded. . . .

ZENGER. Never! Four hundred pounds! Ten times my worth. Rather would I be imprisoned ten times over and thus become a symbol of gross injustice for all free men to see.

ANNA. When the Governor permits you to stand trial, you will be acquitted. Mr. Alexander is the finest lawyer in New York and Mr. Smith is a most able assistant. Surely they will be allowed to defend you?

ZENGER. You forget that Mr. Alexander and Mr. Smith challenged the judges appointed by the Governor, and Judge Delancey said to Mr. Alexander . . . Wait! [*He sits down and writes rapidly, speaking the words as he writes.*] "You have brought it to that point, Mr. Alexander, we must go from the bench, or *you* from the Bar, therefore we exclude you and Mr. Smith from the Bar and the practice of the law."

ANNA. [*As ZENGER sands the sheet.*] You mean they are disbarred permanently?

ZENGER. [*Getting up and folding sheet.*] The Judge's exact words. [*Handing her sheet.*] Keep this. I will require it shortly when I write my editorial on corrupt judges in this city.

ANNA. [*Taking it with a worried frown.*] But, John! They

*must* permit you counsel!

ZENGER. No attorney in New York will defend me. They fear the disapproval of the Governor. A lawyer from outside the Colony was my only hope. Mr. Alexander has appealed to the great Andrew Hamilton of Philadelphia, the attorney of William Penn.

ANNA. [*Clasping her hands in expectancy.*] And he will come?

ZENGER. We fear he is too old and feeble to undertake so arduous a journey by stage.

ANNA. Oh, John! What if your trial were called suddenly?

ZENGER. The court has appointed a lawyer named Chambers to defend me.

ANNA. I have heard of him. He is very able.

ZENGER. But his heart is not in the case. He is more interested in technicalities than in principles. [*Pacing.*] Remember all this well, Anna, that you may explain some day to our children this great principle called Liberty, which enables a man to endure hardship and imprisonment gladly for its sake.

ANNA. In the long history of mankind . . . in the unending struggle for a good way of living, there have always been men like you; willing to fight and suffer and sometimes to die for what they think is right.

ZENGER. This struggle of mine is a small thing if it will but help establish the freedom of the press in our Colony.

ANNA. We are so proud of you, John . . . the children and I.

ZENGER. You are of great help to me, Anna dear.

ANNA. It is little I do. Your fight is my fight.

ZENGER. When a youth in Germany I dreamed of the great America beyond the Atlantic where a man could work and hope; and plan a fine free life . . . in a land where he could have opportunities and religious liberty and freedom to say freely what is right.

ANNA. It is still a great free land. But the governors of the Crown sometimes forget.

ZENGER. I will keep on fighting for a free press.

ANNA. In time to come, America will be the freest land on earth.

ZENGER. But for the hardship my family endures because of my imprisonment, I am glad that I can so serve my children's native land.

ANNA. Oh, John, you are indeed a good man. [*She kisses him.*]  
[*A key is heard turning in the lock. They look towards the door.*]

ZENGER. Mr. Alexander!

ANNA. [*Sigh of relief.*] At last!

ALEXANDER. [*Enters. The door closes behind him.*] Good day to you, Mrs. Zenger.

ANNA. Good afternoon, Mr. Alexander.

ALEXANDER. [*Going to JOHN and shaking his hand.*] And how are you, John?

ZENGER. I grow worried and uneasy.

ALEXANDER. You have kept busy?

ZENGER. Tomorrow's editorial is written. [*He indicates papers in ANNA's hand.*]

ANNA. [*Holding them up.*] You shall see it in proof tonight.

ALEXANDER. Good! [*Turning to ZENGER.*] I bring you encouraging news, John. Your trial is called for tomorrow.

ANNA. Good! How we have waited for the day!

ZENGER. [*Excited.*] Tomorrow?

ALEXANDER. The news has spread throughout the town. People are gathering in the streets. They hold you in great esteem, John.

ZENGER. I am but a plain publisher.

ALEXANDER. A truthful publisher on behalf of the people. No other newspaper in these Colonies has every edition sold out as soon as it is issued.

ANNA. [*Proudly.*] Sometimes two or three editions are required to meet the demands. I must note the date of your trial in tomorrow's issue. [*Puts her hand on JOHN's arm.*] And now I must bid you farewell. God bless you, John. [*She kisses his cheek.*]

ZENGER. Goodbye, my dear.

ANNA. Good afternoon to you, Mr. Alexander. [*She holds out her hand.*]

ALEXANDER. [*Bowing low over her hand.*] Mrs. Zenger. [*He then escorts her to door, nods to someone outside. The door is opened, she exits and door closes. ALEXANDER turns back to ZENGER.*] Your good wife is much admired for her sweet nature and her charm.

ZENGER. I do not know what I would do without her comfort and her help.

ALEXANDER. Your cause is her cause. [*Paces with his hands behind his back.*] I dare say I should have informed her. . . . [*Pause.*] No!

ZENGER. [*Tense.*] Of what?

ALEXANDER. But no. It was a cruel journey for a gentleman of his years to undertake.

ZENGER. [*Tense.*] Who?

ALEXANDER. And should he prove unable to appear in your behalf tomorrow, Mrs. Zenger will be one more that is disappointed.

ZENGER. Pray do not keep me conjecturing. Mr. Hamilton has actually arrived in New York?

ALEXANDER. [*Quietly.*] He arrived this morning by stage from Philadelphia. He is a very old man and the journey has tired him so that he may not be able to attend the trial tomorrow.

ZENGER. [*Happily.*] You have succeeded in interesting him! [*On the street, some voices are heard. . . .*]

VOICES. [*Chanting.*] Zenger! Zenger! Zenger!

ZENGER. [*Running to the barred window and looking out.*] What is that?

ALEXANDER. The people are already gathering in the streets. They have heard of Mr. Hamilton's arrival. They know your trial is called for tomorrow. They are all with you, John. [*There is a slight commotion at the door. It is opened and MR. SMITH steps in.*]

SMITH. [*Breathless.*] Mr. Alexander, I crave your indulgence. . . .

ALEXANDER. Mr. Smith!

SMITH. . . . but I have brought Mr. Hamilton to see Mr. Zenger.

ALEXANDER. I left him resting at the inn. He is too tired and ill to make his way through the crowds.

SMITH. He would not be denied.

[*He steps aside and ANDREW HAMILTON enters. He is a very old man, past eighty. He is bent and white-haired and leans heavily on a cane.*]

ALEXANDER. [*Rushing to him and supporting him.*] Mr. Hamilton, you should not have attempted to come down to the jail.

HAMILTON. I wished to speak to the prisoner. [*He smiles.*] Help me to a chair, James. [SMITH *pushes forward a chair. HAMILTON sinks slowly into it.*] And now, present me to the man I traveled far to meet; the man imprisoned because he claimed the freedom of the press.

ALEXANDER. John, I have the honor to present Attorney Andrew Hamilton of Philadelphia. Mr. John Peter Zenger. [*He bows.*]

ZENGER. [*Going to HAMILTON with both hands outstretched.*] You are more than kind to come here to see me. I am grateful. [*They shake hands.*]

HAMILTON. [*In feeble but round tones.*] Mr. Smith has explained the issues of the trial and the background of the struggle between the Colonists and the Governor. Now I should like your statement, Mr. Zenger.

ZENGER. The issue is simple, Mr. Hamilton. May an editor tell the truth in his newspaper even if it is in criticism of the Governor and the Government? They call what I have written abusive and seditious.

SMITH. That is why some irresponsible wretches broke into his print-shop and destroyed the presses.

[HAMILTON *signs him not to interrupt.*]

ZENGER. May an editor protest against injustice and oppression? Can an editor be silenced for criticizing bad government? May an editor call upon the Governor to account to the people for money collected as taxes? [*Quietly.*] These are the issues as I see them.

HAMILTON. Very concisely put. Very concisely put. [*Turning to the lawyers.*] Now, gentlemen, the law of the case.

ALEXANDER. You have had an opportunity to examine our brief on the law?

HAMILTON. I have. I find your choice of precedent cases excellent. Your challenging arguments against the old Star Chamber decisions of despotism and oppression are scholarly and to the point.

SMITH. We reasoned that the judges would invoke those old decisions and charge the jury to decide only whether the newspaper containing the alleged libelous statements was published. Granted this, the court will decide if the publication is criminal libel.

HAMILTON. Defense counsel will have to persuade the jury to ignore those instructions and follow its own conscience.

ALEXANDER. The Clerk of the Court tried to give us a jury composed of the Governor's sympathizers but we succeeded in getting it drawn from a proper representative panel.

SMITH. In court we have had to take our courage in both hands.

HAMILTON. I know. And you have been rewarded with disbarment.

ALEXANDER. A small price to pay since it made the public aware of the grave issues involved.

SMITH. The people believe that Mr. Zenger's acquittal may secure us a new government from the King.

ZENGER. But win or lose, there can be no turning back. The fight for free speech and for a free press must go forward. We in New York are bitter over the government's aggression. We resent the high-handed measures which the Governor has adopted.

—Appointing judges at his pleasure without consent of the Council; refusing to account for the excessive taxes he is collecting, and delaying the trials of persons not in favor with his government.

SMITH. Mr. Zenger's is a case in point. Two grand juries refused to indict him. So the Attorney General, acting on the Governor's orders, filed an Information charging him with "false, scandalous and seditious libels against the Crown."

HAMILTON. Why was this man not brought to trial soon after his arrest?

ZENGER. The Governor willed otherwise. It pleased him to keep me imprisoned nine months, hoping I would retract.

HAMILTON. I take it you will go to trial inadequately defended?

ZENGER. I must accept the Governor's choice of counsel unless . . . unless . . . Mr. Hamilton . . .

[*Silence.* HAMILTON's head sinks low on his chest. He is thinking. All watch him anxiously. He speaks slowly and deliberately.]

HAMILTON. I have fought many legal battles in the past. I have long since bequeathed to the young men of the Bar the defense and prosecution; the making of briefs and the physical labor of trial work. My vital forces are all but exhausted. I am ill.

ALEXANDER. We are aware of the unfortunate state of your health.

ZENGER. Forgive me. I know it would be dangerous to your life to defend me in court.

SMITH. [*Sincerely.*] I regret that we persuaded you to undertake the arduous journey to New York.

ALEXANDER. If it so pleases you, Mr. Hamilton, we will escort you back to your inn.

HAMILTON. [*Holding up a hand.*] Wait! [*Slowly but more forcibly.*] I am an old man. True. And ill. Yet . . . the cause of free speech and the right of a free press is a great cause. [*Silence. From far away, voices may be heard chanting, ZENGER! ZENGER! ZENGER!*] So . . . [*He struggles to his feet.* ALEXANDER and SMITH

would help him, but he waves them aside.] . . . I will defend you, Mr. Zenger, in court tomorrow. [*He stands an instant, wavers and then sits down heavily. The voices are chanting all through this, and the chant increases in volume as he speaks.*] It may be my last court trial on earth. But it seems to me no greater cause can come to any lawyer.  
[*Voices come up very loudly chanting ZENGER! ZENGER! as . . .*]

## BLACKOUT

## SCENE II

*The courtroom, next day.*

*During the BLACKOUT, dark curtains have been drawn across the barred windows and door. The table has been cleared of properties. Table has been turned, narrow side to audience, and brought over to down right.*

*All during BLACKOUT voices chant ZENGER! The chant starts low and increases in volume until stage shifts are made. Voices out as a spot comes up on ZENGER standing behind table. ALEXANDER and SMITH are seated on either side of him. ANNA ZENGER, wearing her bonnet, sits just outside the rim of light, partially in shadow. She watches her husband anxiously. ALEXANDER and SMITH sit with folded arms.*

ZENGER. [*Addressing first two rows of audience.*] Full freedom is the marrow of the bones of our people. Oppression has thrown down the gauntlet. . . . I have picked it up. Is life worth while without liberty? That is for you, the people, to decide. I have done my part.

[*He sits. ANNA leans forward and smiles at him. He smiles back. SMITH pats him on the back. ALEXANDER shakes his hand. He folds his arms on the table. Spot remains on him. Another spot picks up HAMILTON seated in chair down left. His hands are*

*folded on his cane and his head is bent. As light focuses on him, he gets to his feet slowly and stands leaning heavily on cane. He looks out over the audience. His eyes come to rest on the first two rows of the orchestra, still in darkness. He addresses these rows.]*

HAMILTON. Gentlemen of the jury: [*Pause.*] As you see . . . [*Pause.*] I labor under the weight of many years and am borne down with great infirmities of the body. . . . Yet old and weak as I am, I should think it my duty if required to go to the utmost part of the land, where my service could be of any use in assisting to quench the flame of prosecution upon informations set afoot by the Government to deprive a people of the right of remonstrating, and complaining too, against the arbitrary attempts of men in power.

VOICES. [*Chanting faintly from street.*] Zenger! Zenger! Zenger!

HAMILTON. Men who injure and oppress the people under their administration provoke them to cry out and complain; and then make that very complaint the foundation for new oppressions and prosecutions. [*He sways. ALEXANDER jumps to his feet. But HAMILTON recovers, stands more upright. ALEXANDER sits down.*] I look with shame at this trial. But when I look into your eyes, I see courage there and my hopes rise.

VOICES. [*Slightly closer.*] Zenger! Zenger!

HAMILTON. [*Turns his head and listens an instant.*] When I hear the cheers of the crowd outside for Zenger I know the hearts of the people of this Colony are with this defendant. When I see the tense interest of the people in this courtroom, I feel that the heart of this audience is waiting for your verdict, gentlemen of the jury, to give it new life. [*He takes a handkerchief from his pocket and touches it to his lips.*] Liberty always depends upon courage and the determination of the people to support it at all costs. [*He looks out over the audience.*] You came to these shores—the most vigorous and bravest of Europe's children, you followed the gleam of liberty and opportunity. [*His*

*eyes go to first two rows.]* You who sit in this jury box are one of the greatest bulwarks of liberty. To you we look to maintain that guarantee of the Magna Charta: "To none will we sell, to none deny or delay right or justice." [*His tone is more intimate.*] I know you gentlemen of the jury have the power beyond all dispute to determine in a libel case both the law and the fact. You cannot leave to the Court the determination as to whether the words are libelous or not, as that in effect renders juries useless in many cases, to say no worse . . . the judges how great soever they be, have no right to fine, imprison or punish a jury for not finding a verdict according to the direction of the Court. Jurymen are to see with their own eyes, to hear with their own ears, and to make use of their own consciences and understandings, in judging of the lives, liberties or estates of their fellow subjects. [*Pause, while he takes two slow steps forward.*] A John Peter Zenger is a rallying-point for those whose heads are high, whose hearts are strong, whose love of liberty sings in the bright sunshine of this new world. I appeal to the courage in your souls, that you inherited from those brave men and brave women who sent you forth to this Continent to find that which in many countries of Europe they were unable to achieve—liberty of conscience, liberty of speech, liberty of the press.

VOICES. [*On street; closer.*] Zenger!

HAMILTON. Let the pen of Zenger be silenced by jail, and who will dare again to write fearlessly? Let despotism now succeed to put shackles on this courageous man. . . . [*Speaks next line louder.*] . . . and who again will challenge a despotic government? [*He wipes brow with his handkerchief. He speaks more quietly.*] That my client Zenger has a great zeal for liberty is admitted. He is charged with false, malicious, seditious and scandalous libel. . . . I agree that the Government is a sacred thing, but I do not agree that complaint of a bad administration of the Government and the acts of the Governor is a criminal libel. The question before the Court and you, gentlemen of the jury, is not a small nor a private concern, it is not the cause of a

poor printer, nor of New York alone, which you are now trying. No! It may in its consequence affect every freeman who lives under British Government on the main of America, and countless generations yet to come. [*Pause while he comes down two or three steps.*] Let us at least do our duty, and like wise men (who value freedom) use our utmost care to support liberty, the only bulwark against lawless power, which in all ages has sacrificed to its wild lust and boundless ambition the blood of the best men that ever lived!

[*Pause. He sways, reaches for the table with one hand. All on stage get to their feet with their eyes on him as . . .*]

#### BLACKOUT

#### SCENE THREE

*An hour later. BLACKOUT is only for an instant.*

*A light appears on first two rows in audience. Six men are sitting in first row and six immediately behind them. All are leaning forward. These men are the jury. Another light then comes up on ZENGER, who is standing with his hands gripping edge of table. ALEXANDER and SMITH stand on either side of him. ANNA is standing, but nearer her husband. A third light comes up on HAMILTON who is sitting in his chair, hands clasped on his cane and head bent over his hands. All but HAMILTON are staring at the jury.*

FOREMAN. [*Sitting at beginning of row of six men in the first row, rises.*] We find the defendant, John Peter Zenger, not guilty of publishing false, scandalous and seditious libels against the Crown.

[*Pause.*]

VOICES. [*In street, now loud and close at hand.*] Zenger! Zenger! Huzzah for Zenger! Zenger! Zenger!

[*All the jury rise. ALEXANDER and SMITH each wring one of ZENGER'S hands. ANNA comes to him with arms outstretched. CROWD yells louder as . . .*]

COMPLETE BLACKOUT

THE END



# AMERICAN SAINT OF DEMOCRACY

By

FRED EASTMAN

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# AMERICAN SAINT OF DEMOCRACY

## CHARACTERS

DEMOCRACY: *A young woman, tall, well-proportioned, dignified, deep-voiced.*

JOHN WOOLMAN: *Age 23. A young tailor and assistant shop-keeper. Alert in mind, friendly in manner. A Quaker who takes his religion seriously, especially his "concern" against slavery and in behalf of the "Great Brotherhood."*

ELI POMEROY: *Age 50, WOOLMAN's employer. Owner of store, bakery, and tailor shop. Shrewd, honest, and eager to expand his business in the growing settlement. A bit obsequious to customers.*

MR. GILLESPIE: *Age 48, mill and tavern owner. Energetic and somewhat splenetic; blunt, but not unkind. Recently arrived from New York. Wants to make money quickly and inclined to ride rough-shod over those who oppose him—except his daughter.*

CHARLOTTE: *Age 20, his vivacious daughter; a good sort, but self-centered and somewhat spoiled by her indulgent father. She has his determination and drive, but tempered with sweetness and a little light.*

PRUDENCE: *Age 17, a Quaker girl who tends shop for POMEROY. Demure and reserved, but intelligent and friendly.*

DELIA: *Age 24, a slave woman, about to be torn from her husband and child by a prospective sale.*

TIME: *A morning in early autumn, 1743.*

PLACE: JOHN WOOLMAN's tailor shop in connection with the bakery and store of ELI POMEROY, Mt. Holly, New Jersey.

## FOREWORD

THE quiet figure of John Woolman has walked steadily across our social history since his death in 1772, and has grown in stature and significance with the passing decades. Yet until comparatively recent years he has been little known beyond the limits of the Quaker fellowship in which he was born. Seldom have the schoolbooks mentioned him. But the more historians uncover the beginnings of the social movements which have combined to make the Christian democracy we cherish, the more they recognize the important pioneer role played by this humble colonial tailor and orchard tender in sowing the seeds which ultimately blossomed in collective efforts to abolish slavery, deal justly with the Indians, improve the condition of farmers and laborers, eliminate the causes of war, and promote what he called "the Great Brotherhood."

Better known contemporaries of his—Rousseau and Paine, Franklin and Jefferson—were thinking and writing along these lines; what made Woolman unique was his method. It was the Quaker method of long meditation upon his "concern" and the causes of the evil that troubled him, waiting for the "inner light," discussing the matter with other Quakers, then boldly setting out at his own expense to persuade those responsible for the evil to see the thing in the light of Christ's teachings. He organized no societies, raised no budgets, appointed no committees. He simply walked—sometimes hundreds of miles—to the community where the evil flourished, entered the homes of those who profited by it, with sweet reasonableness tried to show them the injustice they were doing to their less fortunate brothers and appealed to their better natures to right the wrong. Pursuing this method he made long journeys into the southern colonies where slavery was the accepted order of the day even

among Quakers; into remote sections of Pennsylvania where Indians and white men were massacring each other; into New England where traders in slaves waxed rich; and finally to England itself where larger traders centered their international slave traffic with the aid and connivance of the government itself. "The advantage of John Woolman's slow, thorough, individual way of working," writes Janet Whitney, in her recent biography of him, "was that everyone convinced became one to convince another."

No thirty-minute play can deal comprehensively with any historical character, much less one of Woolman's calibre. At best it can portray him only in some moment of crisis. This I have endeavored to do, choosing a day in his early twenties just after he had returned from his first southern journey when he was beginning to wrestle with the tough problem of slavery. He did not settle that problem, even in the instance of a single slave owner, in thirty minutes (only a dramatist with plenty of license could do that) but he planted the seed which eventually brought forth its harvest. In this play I have tried to reveal his spirit and method in the hope that amateur groups may have a vehicle by which they can portray sympathetically and movingly this American Saint of Democracy to their modern audiences.

F. E.

# AMERICAN SAINT OF DEMOCRACY

## PROLOGUE \*

*Spoken in Front of the Curtain by DEMOCRACY*

I am Democracy,  
Mother of liberty.  
I am friend of all peoples,  
Foe of all tyrants.  
By me you have free homes,  
Free schools, free churches,  
Free speech, and free elections.  
Following my way of life  
You choose your own work,  
Your own play, your own temples,  
Your own leaders.

You have cherished me,  
Fought for me, died for me.  
Yet many of you do not know  
Whence I came, or how,  
Or who nourished me  
When I was but an infant.

Know, then, that I am child  
Of your religion which teaches  
That man's worth and dignity  
Are rooted in his godhead;  
That all men, children of God,  
Are brothers of each other.  
This teaching was revealed to you

\* This Prologue may be omitted if necessary, or it may be printed on the program.

By your prophets and seers  
In generations past.

Your forefathers did not always  
Receive this truth with understanding.  
Often they stoned the prophets  
And slew the seers.  
But they could not kill *me*,  
For I was spirit, not body;  
And as a spirit I entered into  
New bodies, new minds, new hearts  
And I kept on growing.  
I grew in the hearts of men  
Who founded the Swiss and Dutch Republics,  
The Commonwealth of England,  
The United States of America.

Tonight I bring you a story  
Of how I grew in the heart of  
A young man, who dwelt  
In the Valley of the Delaware  
Two centuries ago.  
John Woolman, his name;  
Tailor by trade, Quaker by faith,  
Humble of spirit, kind of heart, strong of will,  
In manners gentle, in wit a man.

He was but one among many  
Who followed the inner light  
But following it he led the way  
For many another into the  
Great Brotherhood  
Where I live  
And you, and you, and all  
Who love liberty.

## AMERICAN SAINT OF DEMOCRACY

*The rising Curtain reveals the tailor shop of JOHN WOOLMAN. The room is of moderate size, about eighteen feet wide and twelve feet deep. The only furnishings consist of an eight-foot counter, along the upper right half of the shop; a work table, about three feet by five, left center; and three Windsor chairs, one back of the table, one in front of it, the other along the right wall. A door to the street opens from the center of the rear wall; another to the store from the upper left wall. Back of the counter are shelves on which rest bolts of cloth, men's hats, women's bonnets, rolls of ribbons, and cards of buttons. PRUDENCE is busy arranging the goods upon the shelves. Enter CHARLOTTE from left.*

PRUDENCE. Good morning to thee.

CHARLOTTE. Good morning. Is this where Mr. John Woolman works?

PRUDENCE. Yes, Miss. He will be in a little later. Is there anything I can do for thee?

CHARLOTTE. Will you tell him that my father is buying me a slave from Mr. Pomeroy? They are in the store talking over the details. They want Mr. Woolman to make out the bill of sale.

PRUDENCE. A slave for *thee*, Miss?

CHARLOTTE. Yes. This is my birthday and father thinks I'm old enough. I'm twenty. I've never had a slave until now—won't it be jolly?

PRUDENCE. I'll tell Mr. Woolman. Thy name is Gillespie, isn't it?

CHARLOTTE. How did you know? I'm quite new here.

PRUDENCE. Oh, everyone knows about the mill thy father is building. It's such a small town we soon learn about the new-

comers. I hope thee likes it here, Miss.

CHARLOTTE. Thanks. I hope so. You are a Quaker, aren't you?

PRUDENCE. Yes, Miss. Most of us hereabouts are Quakers.

CHARLOTTE. No harm in that, I suppose. But in New York they get sent to jail.

PRUDENCE. Why?

CHARLOTTE. I don't know much about it. Father says they have queer ideas about some inner light, and not taking oaths, and not having steeples on their churches. Are they that way here?

PRUDENCE. [*With a twinkle.*] Yes, Miss. We are queer, too. But some are queerer than others.

CHARLOTTE. I suppose so. But I don't see why people have such funny notions. If everyone belonged to the Church of England it would be much simpler.

PRUDENCE. Yes, Miss, but *my* father says if we all belonged to one church and that church was *wrong*, then we would all be damned.

CHARLOTTE. But the Church of England *couldn't* be wrong.

PRUDENCE. Does the Pope think that, Miss?

CHARLOTTE. Oh, let's not talk about religion. I'm broad-minded. I believe in letting people make mistakes about it if they want to.

PRUDENCE. Yes, Miss. Is there anything about the tailor shop I can show thee?

CHARLOTTE. [*Looking about curiously.*] Oh, this is a tailor shop? I thought it was a part of Mr. Pomeroy's bakery and store.

PRUDENCE. It is. Mr. Pomeroy owns it, but he employs John Woolman to do the tailoring.

CHARLOTTE. Hats, cloth, ribbons, buttons—how nice! Does he tailor things for women as well as men?

PRUDENCE. Yes, Miss. Cloaks, gowns, stays, stomachers—everything needful.

CHARLOTTE. Is he a *good* tailor?

PRUDENCE. Oh, yes. He's *good*. Goes to meeting every first day.

Reads religious books. Very conscientious. He used to be quite gay—went to all the parties of the young folks. But somehow of late he's grown more serious—

CHARLOTTE. [*Laughing.*] I didn't mean good that way. I meant, is he a good *tailor*?

PRUDENCE. I think so, Miss. Everybody likes him. He uses only the best of woolens.

CHARLOTTE. Has he been around much, to know how people dress in the cities?

PRUDENCE. He's been to Philadelphia twice! That's twenty-five miles away. Have you been there?

CHARLOTTE. Of course. And to Boston.

PRUDENCE. To Boston! Do tell! And you have lived in New York! That's almost everywhere, isn't it?

CHARLOTTE. Just about. I thought I'd be bored in a small village without excitement—but when Father promised me a slave on my birthday—

PRUDENCE. Oh, we have excitement here. Lots of it.

CHARLOTTE. What kind of excitement?

PRUDENCE. We've had a witch trial.

CHARLOTTE. A witch trial? How did it come out?

PRUDENCE. They weighed the people accused of being witches in a big pair of scales against a Bible. If they had really been witches it was said they would have been lighter than the Bible; but every one of them, when put in the scales, came down plump and the Bible went up. So they were found not guilty.

CHARLOTTE. That doesn't sound so exciting. What else do you have?

PRUDENCE. There's bear hunts, and the whipping post and the stocks—

CHARLOTTE. That's not the sort of thing I mean. Are there any parties?

PRUDENCE. Oh, yes, sleigh-riding and skeeting in winter on the river.

CHARLOTTE. That's all outdoors. Don't you have anything in

the homes—or the taverns?

PRUDENCE. At Christmas time there's a great deal of celebration in the taverns; many people get drunk.

CHARLOTTE. So? I had heard the Quakers don't celebrate Christmas.

PRUDENCE. They don't. They just get drunk. Then they have to stand up in meeting and apologize. That's exciting.

CHARLOTTE. Gracious! That's silly. The Church of England members get drunk at Christmas, but they do it to celebrate the birth of Christ. They don't have to apologize for that. You folks—

PRUDENCE. Oh, not all of us. John Woolman doesn't, nor most of the more serious ones. John Woolman has a real concern about it.

CHARLOTTE. Well, I hope he has a concern about the right fashions in women's clothes, too.

PRUDENCE. I wouldn't know about that, Miss. But he has one about slavery.

CHARLOTTE. Gracious! Does he think there's anything wrong about keeping slaves? All the best people do it.

PRUDENCE. I know.

CHARLOTTE. And even the Quakers, with all their queer ideas, have slaves, don't they?

PRUDENCE. Some do, Miss. Others don't keep them; they just buy and sell them.

POMEROY. [*Calling from store off left.*] Prudence! Prudence, come here, please!

PRUDENCE. [*Calling.*] Coming, Mr. Pomeroy! I'll see what he wants. [*Starts toward left door.*] Will you wait, Miss?

CHARLOTTE. No, I'll be back shortly. You'll tell Mr. Woolman about the bill of sale?

PRUDENCE. Yes, Miss.

[*Exit CHARLOTTE by center door.*]

POMEROY. [*Enters left, followed by MR. GILLESPIE.*] This way, Mr. Gillespie. Oh, Prudence, will you tend the store while I

talk with Mr. Gillespie?

PRUDENCE. Yes, sir. Mr. Gillespie's daughter was just in, looking for John Woolman. I told her he would be here soon.

POMEROY. Good. I hope, Mr. Gillespie, we may have the trade of your daughter as well as yourself. Did you tell her, Prudence, about our new woollens and all the exciting things we have to offer?

PRUDENCE. I told her about the excitements, sir.

GILLESPIE. She'll find them out soon enough. She's an expensive lass, but my only one and I'm afraid I'm spoiling her. [*Looking about.*] You'll have to enlarge your stock if you satisfy all her whims.

POMEROY. We'll do that, sir. As fast as our customers wish. We're getting more like Philadelphia every day. Run along, Prudence. [*Exit PRUDENCE left.*] Be seated, Mr. Gillespie. [*They sit—POMEROY left of work table, GILLESPIE right.*] Now we can talk with less interruption. Was there something else you wish to order?

GILLESPIE. Not today. You have the ale, the rum, the whiskey, the molasses, the saws and nails?

POMEROY. [*Checking his list.*] All of them. I shall take care of everything.

GILLESPIE. And promptly, Mr. Pomeroy. I want things when I want them—not a month later. We can do a lot of business together if you will remember that. Otherwise I'll go elsewhere.

POMEROY. Have no fear. We've needed that new mill of yours. And now that you are taking over the old tavern, there should be better business in it, too.

GILLESPIE. There's good money in a tavern if it's run on business principles.

POMEROY. I'm sure it will prosper under an energetic man like you.

GILLESPIE. What would you think of Christmas as the time for the grand opening?

POMEROY. The best occasion for it! I'll have your ale and

liquor and spirits in plenty of time. How about yourself—wouldn't you like a new suit of clothes for the occasion?

GILLESPIE. [*Glancing at his rather worn suit.*] Not a bad idea. Can your man Woolman do a good job?

POMEROY. First class. I trained him myself.

GILLESPIE. Um. I'll think about it.

POMEROY. Will you need any slaves?

GILLESPIE. That's what I wanted to talk with you about. This one I'm buying this morning for my daughter—you're sure she's all right?

POMEROY. Without a doubt. Strong, healthy, docile. A good worker. Not a lazy bone in her.

GILLESPIE. She ought to be good for the price I'm paying. I could buy a good horse for that amount, or a couple of cows.

POMEROY. For the tavern and your mill, you will want boys, or men?

GILLESPIE. I want you to be on the lookout for a man for the mill, and a likely boy for the tavern.

POMEROY. [*Noting the items.*] Boy for the tavern. Anything else, sir?

GILLESPIE. Yes. These Quakers and this fellow Woolman. Are they trouble-makers?

POMEROY. No indeed. They are my best customers. And Woolman is a fine young fellow. He came with me only three years ago right off his father's farm. He's learned the business quickly. Not only keeping the shop, but posting my books, appraising lands, drawing up wills. Why, he's the nearest thing to a lawyer we have here. In addition, he's learned the tailoring trade. He's brought me much business. What more could I ask?

GILLESPIE. Um. Sounds like an up and coming man. Maybe I could use him myself. I'll need a manager someday.

POMEROY. Oh, don't take him away from me, sir! I'd be lost without him.

GILLESPIE. Well, not for the present anyway. But I heard that he has queer ideas about slavery. Hasn't he just taken a journey

through Maryland and Virginia—

POMEROY. Yes, yes. He had what the Quakers call “a concern” about it and nothing would do but he must see things for himself. I have no doubt that he’s satisfied himself that everything’s all right. You’ve got to let a strong-minded youngster find such things out his own way—don’t you think?

GILLESPIE. I suppose so. But I’ll say this now—before I’ve seen him: Don’t let him start making trouble.

POMEROY. Oh, he never makes trouble. He’s peaceable. Very religious—but peaceable.

GILLESPIE. Let him keep his religion out of my business, that’s all. They don’t mix.

POMEROY. No, they don’t mix. Not with most people, anyway. [*Then, doubtfully.*] But John is different. [*A sudden inspiration occurs to him.*] May I offer a suggestion, sir?

GILLESPIE. What is it?

POMEROY. If you would have him measure you for a suit, that would kind of—

GILLESPIE. You mean it would put him in the right attitude at the start? Master and employee. Um. Well, perhaps. Why isn’t he here now?

POMEROY. This morning he had to attend to some legal business for me—appraising a piece of land. He ought to be here by ten o’clock.

GILLESPIE. [*Rising.*] That gives me a few minutes to collect my daughter. You have the slave bill of sale made out. [*Going up center.*]

POMEROY. I will, sir. Everything will be in order.

[*Exit GILLESPIE center. POMEROY mops his brow, looks after him a moment, then goes out left. Enter from the street DELIA, a slave woman of 24. She seems distraught and looks about fearfully. She peers into the store cautiously but fails to see the one for whom she is looking. She turns back to the empty room, sinks to the floor front of the counter, moans “O Lawdy, Lawdy!” then buries her head in her hands, a picture of despair. Enter*

from center JOHN WOOLMAN. *He does not see DELIA at first, but walks buoyantly to counter, takes off his jacket and puts on his tailor's apron, picks up from a counter drawer an unfinished coat, needle and thread, goes to the table and sits upon it, cross-legged, tailor-fashion, and starts to sew up a seam. He hums "Our God, our help in ages past" to the tune of "St. Anne" as he works. A moan from DELIA attracts his attention to her forlorn figure. Quickly he lays aside his work and goes to her, putting a hand gently upon her shoulder.]*

JOHN. Delia! What troubles thee?

DELIA. [*Looking up.*] Is that you, Massa John? De Lawd be praised!

JOHN. Rise up, girl. [*He helps her to her feet.*] Now what is it?

DELIA. You's a good man, Massa John. Don't let dem do it to me! Don't let dem!

JOHN. Don't let them do what?

DELIA. Sell me. Dey's goin' to sell me, Massa John. This mawnin'.

JOHN. Who is selling thee—and to whom?

DELIA. Massa Pomeroy—he's bought me from Massa Haines and he's gonna sell me to Massa Gillespie.

JOHN. Why is Richard Haines selling thee?

DELIA. He say he got to. He ain't prosperin' and he needs the money.

JOHN. Hm. You are married, are you not?

DELIA. Yassa. I's married to Joe, Massa Haines' farmhand. And we got a little boy. Massa Haines goin' to sell dem, too. Dey's goin' to take me from dem. Massa John, fo' God's sake, don't let dem!

JOHN. [*After walking back and forth, troubled in his mind.*] How old is thy little boy?

DELIA. I don' zactly know, Massa John. Seven or eight, maybe? He's a sweet little fella. But he needs me. Joe cain't tend him like me.

JOHN. I understand, Delia. How long have you been with

Richard Haines?

DELIA. Evah since I was knee high. An' I wukked hahd fo' him. He'll say so. I ain't nevah make him no trouble. And Joe ain't.

JOHN. It isn't right. I'm clear in my mind about that, Delia. A mother should not be torn from her child and her husband. But it's legal.

DELIA. What's dat, Massa John—legal?

JOHN. It means there's no law against it. If Pomeroy and Haines and Gillespie all agree to it—and the price is paid—no law of man forbids them.

DELIA. Don't say dat, Massa John! You tell dem dey cain't do it! I'd rather be daid than taken away from my Joe and my little boy!

JOHN. [*Thinking aloud.*] No law of man. But there is a law of God—the law of the Great Brotherhood.

DELIA. Den you pray to God, Massa John. Pray him to stop dem.

JOHN. No, Delia. That puts all the responsibility on God. I think he wants us to take it on ourselves.

DELIA. I cain't take no 'sponsibility. I'se just a po' slave.

JOHN. You are taking responsibility, Delia. For thy husband and son. They are thy part of the Great Brotherhood. It is for us white folks to see that we do our part, and that we don't hinder thee from doing thine.

DELIA. Yassa. But dey's goin' to do it.

JOHN. [*Slowly.*] Maybe so. Maybe no. It depends on the inner light.

DELIA. I don't know about dat, Massa John.

JOHN. It's just this, Delia. God has put in every human breast an inner light to guide us on our way. Some men follow it; others don't. They put their light under a bushel, as the Bible says.

DELIA. Yassa. I guess dey do.

JOHN. And when their inner light is under a bushel, they walk in darkness and do all manner of evil to their fellow men.

DELIA. Yassa.

JOHN. Our responsibility is to help them take that bushel off their light and let it shine.

DELIA. Yassa, let it shine.

JOHN. Pomeroy and Gillespie are going to arrange this sale of thee this morning?

DELIA. Yassa. Dey say for me to come here at ten o'clock and be sold.

JOHN. [*Startled as he realizes the hour has come.*] Then they mean that I shall write the bill of sale.

DELIA. Dat's why I came to you, Massa John. Don't let dem do it!

JOHN. Then, Delia, we must act now.

DELIA. But I cain't do nothin', Massa John. It's you must do it.

JOHN. You can pray.

DELIA. I been prayin'.

JOHN. Listen, Delia, and carefully. Stay right here and pray that we may take the bushel from the inner light of these men. So that the light may shine on their path—and on thy path—and lead us all to the Great Brotherhood.

DELIA. An' if de light shine—den dey won't take me away from my fambly?

JOHN. I hope not.

DELIA. [*Exultingly.*] Den I prays so loud de good Lawd cain't hep but heah me. [*Shouting.*] Let de light shine, O Lawd!

JOHN. No, no! Not that way; *silently!*

DELIA. [*Disappointed.*] Then de Lawd cain't heah.

JOHN. Never fear, he will hear thee.

[*Enter POMEROY, CHARLOTTE and GILLESPIE from left.*]

POMEROY. Ah, here he is—and Delia, too. Miss Charlotte and Mr. Gillespie, this is John Woolman.

[*The introductions are acknowledged by slight bows.*]

JOHN. I feel that I already know the Gillespies.

GILLESPIE. How's that? Have we ever met?

JOHN. No. But three months ago, when I learned that you

are to build a mill here, I wrote to some Friends in New York to inquire about thee.

GILLESPIE. What for? Did you doubt my credit?

JOHN. Not at all. As a citizen of this town I wanted to know if so important a newcomer would be an asset to our brotherhood.

GILLESPIE. Well, now, that wasn't a bad idea. Good business. And what did your friends report?

JOHN. They wrote that you are an honest man, blunt in speech, but not unkind, and that you have done much for the community beyond the demands of duty.

GILLESPIE. Well, I'll be damned!

CHARLOTTE. It's all true, Father. You've always been doing things for the community.

POMEROY. Didn't I tell you, Mr. Gillespie?

GILLESPIE. Young man, you interest me!

JOHN. I hope you will help us make Mount Holly a better place to live in.

GILLESPIE. By George, I will! I'm making it my home; so it's got to be good.

POMEROY. John, Mr. Gillespie is buying the old tavern, too.

JOHN. Is he? That's splendid! That tavern has been a disgrace.

GILLESPIE. What's wrong with it?

JOHN. It has been a breeder of drunkenness and brawls. Not a place for decent people.

GILLESPIE. Um. And just how do you think it should be run?

JOHN. I should think it would be better business in the long run—and better citizenship—to conduct it so as to build up the people's strength rather than tear it down.

GILLESPIE. But how?

JOHN. Make it a place of fellowship, not brawling and drunkenness.

GILLESPIE. Um. In the long run it might pay better. I'll give that a thought.

POMEROY. John, at the moment Mr. Gillespie has the happy

idea of presenting his charming daughter with a slave as a birthday present. Here are the terms. [*Hands him a slip of paper.*] You will make out the bill of sale at once. See that he and his daughter are satisfied in every way. He will want other slaves for his mill and tavern later on. I shall be in the store; call me when you are ready for my signature. [*To the GILLESPIES.*] You will excuse me? [*Exits left. GILLESPIE and JOHN exchange swift, appraising glances. CHARLOTTE looks at DELIA over right, whose eyes are closed as her lips move silently in prayer.*]

GILLESPIE. Well, young man, make sure that document is in order.

JOHN. I shall. Give me a few moments, please. [*He studies it carefully at table.*]

GILLESPIE. Come, Charlotte, let's look over this black girl again. We don't want to make any mistake.

[*GILLESPIE and CHARLOTTE go toward DELIA.*]

DELIA. [*Audibly.*] Oh, Lawdy, let de light shine!

GILLESPIE. What did she say?

CHARLOTTE. Something about the light. Are her eyes all right, Mr. Woolman?

JOHN. I know of nothing wrong with them.

[*GILLESPIE and CHARLOTTE appraise DELIA as if she were an animal, feeling her muscles, examining her ears, her hair, her hands, her feet and ankles, and particularly her eyes.*]

GILLESPIE. [*To JOHN.*] You guarantee that she's all right in every way?

JOHN. To the best of my knowledge she is strong in body and limb.

GILLESPIE. That's not enough. I want to know if she will give us satisfaction as my daughter's slave?

JOHN. [*Slowly.*] You want to know—if she will give satisfaction—as a slave?

GILLESPIE. That's what I said.

JOHN. [*Deliberately.*] No, I think she will not give satisfaction as a slave.

CHARLOTTE. [*Startled.*] What's that? Why not?

GILLESPIE. Yes, why not?

JOHN. I do not believe that one slave in a thousand gives satisfaction to the owner.

GILLESPIE. Now look here, John Woolman, I don't want any sermon on slavery. This is business. Keep your religion out of it.

JOHN. Then I shall remain silent. My business and my religion must walk together.

GILLESPIE. [*Angrily.*] Come, Charlotte, we shall look elsewhere. [*Starts toward center door.*]

CHARLOTTE. But, Father, *this* is the slave I want.

GILLESPIE. But, plague take it! she belongs to Pomeroy and I'll not deal with a man who employs such an idiot as this fellow.

CHARLOTTE. Now, Father, you don't mean that. Mr. Woolman's really quite sane; he's only a little peculiar. And I'm going to want him to tailor my winter cloak. Tell him you are sorry.

GILLESPIE. I will not!

[*There is a moment of awkward silence.*]

DELIA. [*Half aloud.*] Lawdy, let de light shine!

GILLESPIE. Mr. Woolman, do you want our business or do you not?

JOHN. I want it—both for my employer and for myself.

GILLESPIE. Then why can't you act sensibly?

JOHN. I felt I should give thee an honest answer to thy question. I had no intention of preaching.

GILLESPIE. Very well. I accept that as an apology. Perhaps we can let Pomeroy handle the bill of sale. Suppose you measure me for a suit of clothes.

JOHN. Gladly. Will you stand here, please? [*Indicates center.*] And will Miss Charlotte be so kind as to write down the measurements on this sheet as I give them?

CHARLOTTE. Yes—it will be jolly!

[JOHN gives her a sheet of paper, a quill pen and bottle of ink]

*from counter. She sits at his table and notes the measurements as JOHN calls them from time to time. DELIA continues to pray.]*

JOHN. [*Measuring.*] Coat seam: 40 inches.

CHARLOTTE. Coat seam: 40 inches.

JOHN. Waist: 38.

CHARLOTTE. Waist: 38.

JOHN. Right sleeve: 28.

CHARLOTTE. Right sleeve: 28.

JOHN. Left sleeve: 27½.

GILLESPIE. That's good! My tailor in New York always made both sleeves the same length. My left arm's shorter.

JOHN. Right leg of breeches: 25. Left: same.

GILLESPIE. You're a curious fellow, Woolman.

JOHN. [*Going on with the measurements, but instead of calling them out indicates them on the tape for CHARLOTTE.*] I often think so myself.

GILLESPIE. Pomeroy tells me you've been on a journey through the South. He thought you would get your thinking straight about this slavery business.

JOHN. I think I did.

GILLESPIE. Good! You found the white folks not so hard on the blacks as you thought, didn't you?

JOHN. I should say that I found slavery very hard on the white folks, perhaps harder on them than on the blacks.

GILLESPIE. Now what on earth do you mean?

JOHN. Have you not observed that people who live on the labor of others are not as happy as those who live on their own labor?

GILLESPIE. There's something in that. A man's got to work or he'll rot.

JOHN. Exactly. And I found that the white folks who lived on slave labor came near to rotting.

GILLESPIE. Hm. But the negroes themselves—didn't you find them a lazy, shiftless lot?

JOHN. What else could one expect? They had no *incentive*. No matter how hard they labored they could never own anything, never educate their children, or even be sure that their families would not be broken up by sale to other white people.

DELIA. Oh, Lawdy, dem po' famblies! Let de light shine!

JOHN. [*To DELIA.*] Quiet, Delia! [*To GILLESPIE.*] The most unhappy men I saw, though, were not the slaves but the overseers.

GILLESPIE. What was the matter with them?

JOHN. They had the task of compelling the negroes to do what they had no *incentive* to do.

GILLESPIE. [*Rubbing his chin thoughtfully.*] Um. Never thought of it that way.

JOHN. They coaxed, persuaded, scolded, and sometimes whipped. It was the same every day, through hot sun and soaking rain, from sunrise to dark.

GILLESPIE. I've seen that. It's a troublesome job an overseer has.

JOHN. [*Intent on his measuring, wise as a serpent, harmless as a dove.*] I'll venture you wouldn't care to be an overseer.

GILLESPIE. Not me. I can get twice as much work out of a white laborer as any overseer can get out of a black.

JOHN. I believe you are right, sir. I am certain of it. And may I ask, is the difference due to the color of the skin or to the fact that the white man earns a wage and is free?

GILLESPIE. I suppose it's because— [*Suddenly realizing how his mind has been led.*] Look here! What are you driving at?

JOHN. You were asking me what I found on my southern journey—

GILLESPIE. Slavery is an accepted thing in this country.

CHARLOTTE. It's in the Bible, too.

JOHN. Many evil things are in the Bible. But it also says, "Times of ignorance God winked at."

CHARLOTTE. You can't get out of it that way! I heard our minister say that the negroes are the offspring of Cain, and their blackness is the mark God set on Cain because he murdered

Abel. And the children of Cain were always to be slaves. So there!

JOHN. According to the Bible, Miss, all of Cain's race—in fact all the descendants of Adam except Noah—were drowned in the Flood.

GILLESPIE. [*Laughing.*] A good answer!

JOHN. That's all the measuring, thank you both. [*Crossing to counter and getting bolt of cloth.*] Now for the cloth. Here is the best we have—English tweed, just arrived on the last ship. [*Crosses and displays bolt on table.*]

GILLESPIE. Um. Not bad. What do you think, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE. It's lovely! I saw nothing in New York better than this. It's a good color for you.

GILLESPIE. If it suits you, it suits me. The price?

JOHN. Two pounds, six.

GILLESPIE. That's very reasonable. I'll take it.

JOHN. And how about another of darker color of the same quality? Something for Sundays and formal wear? Here is a more conservative color of the same quality.

CHARLOTTE. Good! Father, you must have something special when I give parties.

GILLESPIE. I suppose I must if you say so, my dear. Woolman, why does a man as smart as you seem to be have to tie his mind up with a lunatic notion about slaves?

JOHN. It's a mystery, isn't it? As much a mystery as why a good business man wants to take on a bad investment—

GILLESPIE. *Now* what are you driving at?

JOHN. And call that investment a birthday present for his lovely daughter.

CHARLOTTE. Careful, Father! Don't let him pull any more tricks on you.

GILLESPIE. Don't worry, daughter; you shall have a slave.

CHARLOTTE. But I don't want just any slave; I want this one.

DELIA. [*Half aloud.*] Let de light shine, Lawd!

GILLESPIE. You shall have Delia. Woolman, why do you say

she would be a bad investment?

JOHN. You have said you can get twice the work out of a white worker—

GILLESPIE. I can—but this is a lady's maid we are talking about, not a farm hand.

JOHN. And that a person must work—or he will rot. Do you wish thy daughter to rot?

CHARLOTTE. That's a horrid thing for you to say, Mr. Woolman. Father, don't listen to him!

GILLESPIE. I won't. But I want to find out one more thing: Woolman, do you know anything about this woman that makes you sure she won't give satisfaction as a lady's maid?

JOHN. [*Slowly.*] Yes. I do.

CHARLOTTE. What is it?

GILLESPIE. Yes, what? Out with it!

JOHN. She is married to a slave named Joe who works for Richard Haines. She has a little son. If you take her away from her husband and her son, she will be thinking always of them. Where her treasure is, there will her heart be also.

DELIA. [*Half aloud, but with increasing earnestness.*] Let de light shine!

[GILLESPIE *ponders*; CHARLOTTE *rises and goes over right to* DELIA.]

CHARLOTTE. Delia, is this true?

DELIA. It's God's truth, Missy. Don't tear me away from my man and my little boy! [*She drops to her knees, pleading.*]

GILLESPIE. [*Hardening.*] I won't mix sentiment with business.

JOHN. Nor with a birthday present?

GILLESPIE. I won't be bulldozed by a stiff-necked Quaker. For the last time, Woolman, I give you your choice: will you write this bill of sale, or shall I take my business elsewhere?

JOHN. [*Slowly and after a moment's hesitation.*] I will write the bill of sale, if you will permit me to change it in such a way as to give thee and thy daughter more permanent satisfaction.

GILLESPIE. Then write it—and let's have no more nonsense!

[JOHN sits at his table and writes quickly. GILLESPIE goes to his daughter who stands over DELIA, still kneeling, her hands clasped as in prayer and tears streaming down her face.]

CHARLOTTE. [*Touched with pity.*] But, Father, how can I take her away from her boy?

GILLESPIE. Holy Christopher! Are you going to start in on me?

CHARLOTTE. No, Father, I just never thought about her family. Do all slaves have families?

GILLESPIE. Did you think the storks brought them? [CHARLOTTE weeps on his shoulder.] Come, come! It will be over soon. Get up, Delia. We'll take good care of you.

DELIA. [*Not rising.*] Oh, Lawd, take de bushel away from dis man!

GILLESPIE. [*Puzzled.*] Bushel? Bushel? Woolman, is she crazy? What's this talk about bushel?

JOHN. There's something in the Bible about not keeping thy light under a bushel.

GILLESPIE. There's entirely too much Bible around this place. I've had more than I can stand. Is that bill ready?

JOHN. [*Finishing it and sanding the ink.*] Yes, I'll call Mr. Pomeroy so that he may hear the changes.

[*He steps to the left door and calls POMEROY, who enters immediately.*]

POMEROY. Is everything satisfactory? Where do I sign? [*Comes to left of table.*]

JOHN. We've had a conversation about the matter, and—

GILLESPIE. We had a row!

POMEROY. [*Worried.*] Dear me! I hope it was only a misunderstanding.

JOHN. I was not easy in my mind about the matter.

POMEROY. It was all agreed upon. There was nothing for you to do but—

JOHN. It seemed to me that we were not giving Mr. Gillespie as good a bargain as he and his daughter deserve, so I—

POMEROY. The price was perfectly fair, John. You had no right—

JOHN. Mr. Gillespie is not a man to haggle over price. And you, Mr. Pomeroy, are always just in such matters—

POMEROY. Then what was the difficulty?

GILLESPIE. Let him alone, Pomeroy; I've discovered you can't alter his course once he gets the wind in his sails. What I want to know is, where's he going to land?

DELIA. Let de light shine, O Lawd!

JOHN. The difficulty was that Delia could not give him the satisfaction he wanted as his daughter's maid, since she would be separated from her husband and little boy.

POMEROY. That was not our business.

JOHN. If she did not give satisfaction, then Miss Charlotte would not be happy in her present from her father, and Mr. Gillespie might well hold us responsible. At first I saw no way out, but suddenly it opened to me that there is a way—a way that will be highly gratifying to all concerned.

GILLESPIE. Out with it, man!

JOHN. So I have put it down here on this—shall I say, revised—bill of sale.

GILLESPIE. For the love of Heaven don't read us a legal document! Give us the gist of it in the King's English.

JOHN. It provides that Mr. Gillespie will purchase from thee not only Delia, but her husband Joe and her little son as soon as you can obtain them from Mr. Haines. Thus Mr. Gillespie will keep the whole family together.

GILLESPIE. I'll be damned!

JOHN. I think not, sir, if you will follow the course I have written here. You agree further, once you have come into legal possession of these persons, to set them free, and to pay them a just wage for their services.

POMEROY. Has Mr. Gillespie agreed—

JOHN. Mr. Gillespie, in our conversation, has recognized that

free men work better than slaves. He thus obtains better workers for his mill and his tavern than he could have hoped for otherwise.

GILLESPIE. Never, never, in all my life have I seen such unmitigated presumption—

JOHN. Would not Faith be a better word, sir? Faith in thee as a far-sighted business man? For by this deed of justice and mercy you not only give thy daughter the present she most desired, and provide thyself with grateful employees, but you keep a family together, and you set an example for all citizens of the great brotherhood.

CHARLOTTE. Father, I think it's a lovely idea!

DELIA. [*Pleading.*] Please, Massa Gillespie, me and my Joe will wuk our fingas to the bone for you!

CHARLOTTE. Do it, Father! And free them at Christmas when you have the housewarming at the tavern!

JOHN. At Christmas—yes! It would be a fitting occasion. A gift of freedom would honor Him who came to free us all.

POMEROY. What do you say, Mr. Gillespie? It would make you the outstanding citizen of the community.

GILLESPIE. I say—I say—I am being hornswaggled by a crazy Quaker into doing the most—the most decent thing I have ever done. [*Crossing to back of table.*] Let me sign that paper before I regain my senses.

[JOHN *hands him the paper and he sits and signs.*]

DELIA. De light shines, O Lawd! De light shines!

CURTAIN

**HAYM SALOMON**

**By**

**MARCUS BACH**

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# HAYM SALOMON

## CHARACTERS

ROBERT MORRIS, *first Secretary of Finance*

GOUVERNEUR MORRIS, *his assistant*

GENERAL ROBERT HOWE

CAPTAIN LANDAIS

HAYM SALOMON, *a Jew*

RACHEL, *his wife*

ALEXANDER MACDOUGALL, *a soldier*

A SOLDIER, *leader of a hungry regiment*

TIME: November, 1781

PLACE: The office of Robert Morris in Philadelphia

## HAYM SALOMON

SCENE: *The office of ROBERT MORRIS, Superintendent of Finance. An unpretentious room in the legislative building in Philadelphia.*

*It is a day in November, 1781. Present in the room are: ROBERT MORRIS, GENERAL ROBERT HOWE, GOUVERNEUR MORRIS, and CAPTAIN LANDAIS.*

MORRIS. So you see, gentlemen, we have reached a point in this war where money is as important as men. Unless we can supply food and ammunition to the armies of Washington, St. Clair, and Lafayette, we are lost. Our cause is lost.

HOWE. Mr. Morris, Mr. James Wilson and I are sending six barrels of foodstuff to General Washington at Dobb's Ferry tomorrow.

[MORRIS *turns away, deeply affected.*]

GOUVERNEUR. [*With sincerity.*] You have done that before, General Howe, and we have been unable to pay you back.

HOWE. Freedom, Gouverneur, is the only repayment I ask.

MORRIS. I have told you before of my admiration for these things, General. Six barrels of food will save many lives and many spirits. If it were only six barrels we needed! It's six thousand!

HOWE. I know.

LANDAIS. M'sieur Morris, the Congress elected you as treasurer to devise some plan to *raise* those six thousand barrels. It appears to me that all we have heard today has been a lot of wishing.

HOWE. That's unkind, Captain Landais. Robert Morris has exhausted practically every available avenue for raising money.

LANDAIS. Yes, yes, I know.

GOUVERNEUR. And has put his own fortune into the war as well.

LANDAIS. Surely there are rich men here in Philadelphia who ought to be glad to give some money to save their necks.

HOWE. Many have given. There are always others who, until the guns are turned upon their own homes, won't admit there is a war.

LANDAIS. Admit there is a war? With the streets swarming with deserters? M'sieurs, you would never catch a Frenchman deserting because he had nothing to eat!

MORRIS. If it weren't for *French* Bills of Exchange flooding Philadelphia, money wouldn't be so hard to get.

LANDAIS. I simply wish to inquire whether you have any plan. Your government still owes me a pretty penny for my service with John Paul Jones.

MORRIS. Yes, Captain Landais, I have a plan.

LANDAIS. Well?

MORRIS. I have sent for Haym Salomon.

LANDAIS. What!

GOUVERNEUR. [*Uneasily.*] Haym Salomon!

MORRIS. I wasn't prepared for *your* surprise, Gouverneur.

LANDAIS. Why, Salomon's a Polish Jew!

GOUVERNEUR. It isn't that so much that bothers me. He's a *broker*. The brokers have constantly undersold the government. They have charged exorbitant commissions. They have proved most untrustworthy.

MORRIS. Nevertheless I have sent for him.

LANDAIS. You are establishing a bad precedent, M'sieur.

MORRIS. I have not done this without a great deal of consideration. For the past week I have been with the fighting force of our country. If Britain could see what I saw she would consider the war half won. Men on sentry duty, their hands frozen, their bodies covered with sacks instead of coats, and rags tied to their feet for shoes. All because of a bankrupt treasury! Well, gentlemen, I'm not expecting a lot from Haym

Salomon, but I doubt whether there is a better set of business brains in Philadelphia than his. If we can't get some money from him we can at least solicit his services.

LANDAIS. Salomon was once in a military prison in New York.

HOWE. Is that a disgrace, M'sieur Landais? Nathan Hale was executed in one—and I'll lay a wreath on his grave any day.

GOUVERNEUR. Captain Landais has a point there, General Howe. Salomon was imprisoned by the British for belonging to the American Sons of Liberty. You know, they are a radical organization.

HOWE. I'd like an army made up of the Sons of Liberty, Gouverneur. They'd drive the British up the Hudson in twenty-four hours.

MORRIS. I expected a cry against me because he was one of the Sons and a Jew and a broker. But it isn't only Britain that's fighting us; it's starvation, cold, winter! There's not another way out.

GOUVERNEUR. Have you inquired into Mr. Salomon's transactions?

MORRIS. He has proved himself to be most honest and forthright. He has always dealt honorably. I have it from a reliable source that he has personally given large sums to General Von Steuben, to Don Francisco Rendon, and to James Madison!

HOWE. I know that he contributed to the building of the Protestant Church after putting a large amount into a new synagogue for the Jews.

LANDAIS. Good business probably, General. The Jew is a shrewd man.

MORRIS. It *would* be good business if he did not give most of his gifts anonymously.

LANDAIS. You're enthusiastic, M'sieur, but if you get more from him than he does from you, an *immutable law* will have been set aside.

MORRIS. M'sieur Landais, an *immutable law* was set aside when you weren't killed for firing by mistake on the *Bon Homme Richard*.

LANDAIS. That incident is closed! Only I haven't been paid!

MORRIS. There are always some, M'sieur Landais, who live off the government, and there are always others who live for it. [*There is a knock at the door. MORRIS goes to answer. He admits HAYM SALOMON.*] Thank you for coming, Mr. Salomon. General Howe, Mr. Gouverneur Morris, my assistant, and M'sieur Landais.

LANDAIS. *Captain Landais!*

HAYM. How-do-you-do?

MORRIS. Captain Landais has served in the capacity of interpreter when we dealt in French Bills of Exchange. I'm told you speak French, Mr. Salomon—

LANDAIS. [*Speaking rapidly.*] *Où avez-vous appris à parler français?*

HAYM. *Quand j'étais en voyage.*

LANDAIS. Hmm.

MORRIS. [*Offering HAYM a chair.*] And Spanish, Polish, German equally well, Mr. Salomon?

HAYM. Well, when one's people have had to travel as mine, Mr. Morris—

MORRIS. I understand.

GOVERNEUR. And after much traveling one is naturally thankful for a homeland, too, Mr. Salomon?

HAYM. That no one knows better than he who has been an exile.

LANDAIS. How long were you in the Provost prison, Mr. Salomon?

HAYM. [*Gently.*] You mean the first time or the last, M'sieur?

LANDAIS. [*Confused.*] Well, I—

HOWE. The *third* time, Mr. Salomon!

HAYM. About six months.

MORRIS. You contracted fever there? I believe I heard that you did.

HAYM. Fever is not the only curse of the Provost, Mr. Morris. There is a keeper of the prison who is worse than fever and before whom death is welcome. The poor devils who have died under his hand have had only one prayer, that some day when the prison doors are opened, Captain Cunningham may suffer at least one-fiftieth as much as the torture he has caused. Will the prison doors be opened some day, do you think, Mr. Morris?

MORRIS. I am sure they will, if we can find some way to restore health and morale to the Colonial armies. That is why I have asked you here. We need your help. Men talk of you as "the good Jew" who has made a fortune through fair dealing. Whenever the government enters into competition with you brokers, the price of bills of exchange falls to disastrous levels. I should like one man of ability whom I can trust. If you handle the bills *for* the government what commission will you charge for this service?

HAYM. The matter of commission can wait. About the immediate need, Mr. Morris—

GOVERNEUR. I think we ought to know *exactly* about the commission. Private brokers have charged from three to five percent which is, of course, exorbitant.

HAYM. Trust me, sir.

LANDAIS. Ah, but this is business.

HAYM. [*Annoyed; quietly.*] Yes, yes.

MORRIS. Would you undertake this, Mr. Salomon, for, say, two percent?

[HAYM *shakes his head.*]

GOVERNEUR. That is certainly a most reasonable rate.

LANDAIS. You see, he puts you at his mercy!

HOWE. [*Sharply.*] Mr. Landais!

HAYM. Gentlemen, America has given me much. I am ready

to give much to America. There will be no commission.

MORRIS. What? You aren't serious!

HAYM. I am very serious, Mr. Morris.

MORRIS. [*Going to his files.*] Let me show you the figures from De Luzerne and the financial statements and the correspondence with Count de Grasse—

HAYM. The Bills of Exchange, Mr. Morris! I trust you. Trust me. I know who the undersellers are. Appealing to them to sell high means nothing. We must outsell them. We must dispose of the French bills for credit at six shillings. We must keep the price up, sell at the top and buy where we can. Bills for appropriation must be sold. Tell me how many bills you have, and in a week you shall have the money for them at six shillings.

MORRIS. How shall we get the money if you propose to sell them for credit?

HAYM. I promise you that you shall *have* the money. Give me all the bills you have!

GOVERNEUR. We want to believe you, Mr. Salomon. But when other brokers are asking five percent—and you say you will do this for nothing—

HAYM. Did I not tell you that this country has given me much! I believe General Howe knows what it is to have one's family at one's side—for a man to be able to drink pure water and not be afraid the cup will be knocked from his hand. And do you know what it is to find a homeland? Maybe you do not, but I do! And I will help you, whether you want me to or not!

[*The door opens and ALEXANDER MACDOUGALL comes in with his right arm in a sling.*]

ALEX. Your pardon, gentlemen!

HAYM. Alex!

MORRIS. Mr. MacDougall, I believe.

LANDAIS. [*Amazed.*] Leader of the Sons of Liberty?

ALEX. The Sons of Liberty don't need a leader, my friend.

How are you, General Howe?

HOWE. Better than you, I see, Mr. MacDougall!

HAYM. So they got you, Alex.

ALEX. When a soldier has as much as a sore thumb, he's returned to Philadelphia so he won't eat up their shoe leather for them.

MORRIS. Is there something we can do for you, Mr. MacDougall?

ALEX. If you could, it would be the first time Congress or a Congressional appointee *ever* did anything for me! No, gentlemen, I want to speak to Haym Salomon.

MORRIS. We were just in the midst of a business transaction—

HAYM. [*Gently.*] Alex, is this so urgent?

GOVERNEUR. I really think our business comes first.

ALEX. [*Interrupting.*] It is urgent!

HAYM. Now, gentlemen, I have always been able to handle a man when he has one arm in a sling. And, Mr. Morris, the value of our Bills of Exchange won't drop because of these few minutes' delay. Come, Alex.

LANDAIS. This would never happen in France, M'sieurs!

MORRIS. [*To HAYM.*] Here, you'll use this room.

HAYM. Thank you, Mr. Morris.

[GOVERNEUR *gathers up some papers.*]

MORRIS. [*Confidentially to HAYM.*] We will see you aren't disturbed—again.

HOWE. [*To ALEX; indicating his arm.*] Dobb's Ferry?

ALEX. In a sortie near Yorktown.

[*The COMMITTEEMEN go.*]

HAYM. Now, Alex, are you hurt badly?

ALEX. You mean my arm or finding you here?

HAYM. Finding me here?

ALEX. Rachel is coming too.

HAYM. [*Gently.*] Well, what is this? You said once I was too sick to be a soldier. Now you even say my wife is coming—

ALEX. How much does Morris want?

HAYM. You mean, of my time?

ALEX. Of your money.

HAYM. [*Smiling.*] He hasn't asked yet.

ALEX. Thank God I came early enough.

HAYM. [*Chuckling.*] What do you mean, Alex?

ALEX. I mean they're congregating to take advantage of your generosity.

HAYM. Oh, my generosity! Do I have a reputation for being generous, Alex?

ALEX. You certainly do! Well, now, Haym, you put me in an embarrassing way—I don't suppose you've been as generous with anyone as you have with me.

HAYM. You need money, Alex? [*He reaches for his pocket-book.*]

ALEX. Now just a minute, Haym. Sit down. Let me begin from the beginning. Winning this war means as much to me as it does to you. Maybe more. I've got to get revenge for a shot in the arm. Ah, but you, for suffering in Provost prison, and—

HAYM. It isn't revenge, Alex. It's freedom!

ALEX. All right, it's freedom. It's liberty! But the way Congress is handling things you'd think it was in cahoots with Britain. Not that there *aren't* some Tories among them! What I'm trying to say is that no amount of money you could possibly give would win this war. A *system* is needed, Haym, a system that will tax or draft or steal the resources of all the colonies. Help Robert Morris with your business sense if you want to, but keep your own purse-strings tied.

HAYM. [*Chuckling.*] If I wouldn't know you so well, Alex, I would think you had turned Tory.

ALEX. I know what Rachel meant when she said that "American liberty has become a passion with you." But don't throw any money into this Congressional jackpot.

HAYM. Can we win the war, Alex?

ALEX. Washington can win it. And the Sons of Liberty will help him win it. But the fight just now is here in the treasury. I tell you, Haym, help must come from the *people*, *all* the people. The more *one* man gives the less can be expected from the masses.

HAYM. How much will it take?

ALEX. In these days when ten thousand dollars is a fortune, it will take a hundred—two hundred thousand before winter closes in.

HAYM. Two hundred thousand. . . .

ALEX. And that, strangely enough, can only come if men like you will keep from making the mistake that Washington made.

HAYM. Mistake?

ALEX. Putting one man's whole fortune into a nation's war. Now, you hear, Haym, I'm serious. Tell them all you want about bills of exchange, run the blockade for them, teach them French or Portuguese if you like, but refuse to let them talk you out of a fortune until there is a *united effort* toward rebuilding the armies.

HAYM. It is too bad you think I'm too generous, Alex.

ALEX. Why?

HAYM. I spoke to Mr. Madison today about outfitting the Sons of Liberty into a real fighting line.

ALEX. You mean—with uniforms and guns?

HAYM. I thought they might fight better with guns than with pitchforks.

ALEX. [*With deep sincerity.*] Thank you, Haym. The Sons and Washington's men! It will be a great army! But you still can't win a country getting first one man to finance a campaign and then another.

HAYM. I was coming to that with Mr. Morris.

ALEX. To what?

HAYM. To a plan, Alex.

ALEX. First of all, Haym, do they trust you?

HAYM. Trust me? Implicitly.

ALEX. They should. But they're politicians and Congressmen!

HAYM. Sh-h!

ALEX. Congressmen! You wanted a prisoner exchanged and Congress turned you down. You ask a few favors and they turn deaf ears to you. I appreciate your help with the Sons of Liberty, but, now *promise*—no money through the Secretary of Finance.

HAYM. I can't promise that, Alex.

ALEX. You must. You have done your part. You have already helped James Madison, Edmund Randolph, St. Clair, and who knows how many others.

HAYM. Oh, I have most of that secured.

ALEX. Secured! Tell me, Haym, do you still make four cents a crate on old Mr. Martin's eggs?

HAYM. [*Chuckling.*] Alex, if the men knew this was all you wanted with me—

ALEX. Tell me, do you?

HAYM. Yes, I do. But I pay Mr. Martin a good price, too.

ALEX. And three cents on Bertha Sparks' poultry?

HAYM. [*Firmly.*] Alex, you know how I made most of my money. Running the British blockade to the open sea. And if we had not been at war, I would not have made it. It goes back into the country!

ALEX. [*Topping him.*] I happen to know that you have given the government \$64,000 already and that it is *unsecured*. No, Mr. Salomon, you need someone to take care of you, and if Rachel won't do it, I will. Now, what about this *plan* you have for Robert Morris?

HAYM. It is a plan for a national bank with national currency and—

ALEX. All right, good. It sounds good. And if you can get Congress to understand it, they will probably take it over and run it themselves—into the ground.

HAYM. Your affection for these men is stupendous, Alex!

ALEX. I know them! They'll take your national bank and handle it like they do the war! Or Mr. Morris will handle it.

HAYM. That's what I want. For I tell you, I am not as strong even as Alex MacDougall with one arm.

ALEX. I know that. And I'm frank to tell you, Haym, that if something should happen to you—well, you ought at least prepare your claims for reimbursement from the government.

HAYM. [*Chuckling.*] Now, Alex, I'm not going to die just yet! [*Enter RACHEL.*] Come, Rachel. Tell me, are they getting restless out there?

RACHEL. They had their heads together.

ALEX. That's always the way these things start.

HAYM. But that you have come here, Rachel—?

RACHEL. I had to come.

ALEX. [*Disgruntled.*] Did you? I argued with you for an hour!

HAYM. I thought so!

RACHEL. Is it true that you have given so much to the war, Haym?

HAYM. Nothing excepting money, Rachel.

RACHEL. Alex says that even if the war is won, it will be the end of Continental currency.

HAYM. Alex is one of those unusually thrifty men who is always broke, Rachel.

ALEX. But what she says is true!

HAYM. And if the war is *lost*? Tell me, what then? Will we have ground under our feet as we have now? Will we have homes and the right to work for a native land? Will we have Sons of Liberty then?

RACHEL. You know I agree with you, Haym. But if we should some day be left poor—remember we are not like other Americans.

HAYM. [*Gently.*] Why not, Rachel?

RACHEL. We are Jews and immigrants.

HAYM. It is a land of immigrants. And as for being a Jew—think of poor Alex MacDougall, he's a full-blooded Scotchman! Born in Scotland! But he has his arm in a sling, fighting for America!

ALEX. You have the darndest way of twisting things up.

HAYM. Truth, Alex! So, tell me, Rachel, shall I not go on with my business?

RACHEL. It is up to you, Haym.

HAYM. You hear what she says, Alex?

ALEX. And still I know what I'm talking about!

HAYM. Will you tell the men to come?

ALEX. You are sure to land in Congress, Haym; you can be so stubborn. [*He goes.*]

HAYM. I do not understand, Rachel, why you are afraid.

RACHEL. I know what is in your heart. For a long time you have been helping men and soldiers privately. You have always been waiting for the day that you could help through the Secretary of Finance. That day is here. If you were anyone else you would simply give them a small loan, like others do, and let it go. But you are a patriot. You would turn over everything you have for what you call free ground under your feet. I love you for it, Haym. But I *am* afraid. We have been poor and friendless before.

HAYM. —and there are other Jews here, Tories who have money. Isn't that it, too, Rachel?

RACHEL. I suppose.

HAYM. There is one experience those others have never had. They have never stood in a British prison waiting for death by the rifle squad—as I did in the Provost. And then to be freed! To come out of that and find you and our child and the great hope of liberty!

RACHEL. How were you freed? Because the Sons of Liberty raised money and bribed Britain's Captain Cunningham. It may be an awful thing to say, but money is that powerful. And if we are ever left penniless—

HAYM. [*Chuckling.*] True to his old self, Alex has come through here again like a storm! You need have no fear, Rachel; I will remember both our country and you.

RACHEL. Remember how we came here without money—with our child—and how you dealt for many months in eggs and chickens—and it was a long time before we could eat more than one meal a day.

HAYM. And Rachel was at my side. . . .

RACHEL. The men from the synagogue had to bring us furniture and food. You remember Rebecca Franks? She boasted that they once gave us two dollars, or we would not have eaten!

HAYM. Rebecca's father has often been glad that they gave us those two dollars. . . .

RACHEL. We don't ever want to be poor again, Haym! Remember we are getting older, too.

HAYM. [*Quietly.*] The war has never become very real to us. It must be because we are beyond the sound of guns. And because Alex MacDougall takes it all as a day's work.

RACHEL. That may be true.

HAYM. But somewhere there are hungry, starving men, and cold men and dying, and dead men with empty guns in their hands. Somewhere there are children who will die. Somewhere there are young wives whose husbands will never come out of the Provost as I did.

RACHEL. Haym!

HAYM. I love you, Rachel. I want you to tell me one thing.

RACHEL. Yes?

HAYM. Is it better that we have food or that our children have liberty? Tell me! Tell me, honestly!

RACHEL. You know—if it came to that, what I would say.

HAYM. I do know, Rachel. [*He kisses her.*] Alex can think up more things! But I will have a surprise for him, too! You wait! [*There is the sound of voices. The men come in; ALEX is with them. He is talking excitedly.*]

ALEX. Haym! Rachel! Think what has happened! [*He flour-*

ishes a document.] A special intelligence from Congress! I'm to be a general!

RACHEL. A general!

ALEX. "In recognition of valor and service to the Continental Army and for heroism displayed at Concord, Lexington, and Long Island—" The idiots! What did I do at Long Island! But isn't it wonderful! *General MacDougall!*

HAYM. [*With quiet emotion.*] General MacDougall.

ALEX. Now who was responsible for this? I know John Hancock wasn't anywhere on the field! Neither was Jay nor Adams!

HOWE. You are to be escorted to the Committee. The messenger said a carriage was waiting.

ALEX. A carriage! I march a thousand miles in my bare feet, and now they send a carriage to take me two blocks! Congress, gentlemen, Congress!

HAYM. Go, Alex! Go and get your General's uniform and to-night we celebrate!

ALEX. Tomorrow I'll take the Sons of Liberty up the streets of New York!

HAYM. Yes, Alex, yes!

[*There is the sound of voices and the roll of drums outside, growing louder.*]

ALEX. [*Laughing.*] Listen! I suppose it's even an escort! The way of these politicians, gentlemen! A man fights for years, is wounded, left for dead. No one gives him so much as a drop of water. Then, suddenly, Congress sends a carriage! It says "Report at once! We are going to make you a general in five minutes!" They prepare an escort! [*He hurries out.*]

MORRIS. [*Going to the window.*] It is no escort. Look at them. Rags and dirt. Gouverneur—let their leader in!

LANDAIS. More deserters!

MORRIS. Some call them that. To others they are hungry soldiers. And to still others, they have not lost that indomitable fire.

HAYM. [*Quietly.*] I believe you know what that is, Mr. Morris.

It is something different from the fire of other nations. It is the fire of freedom for a new land.

MORRIS. Yes, Mr. Salomon.

HOWE. What are you going to do with these men, Mr. Morris?

MORRIS. I'm going to tell them that their regiment will have food and money in a week! May I do that, Mr. Salomon?

[GOUVERNEUR *admits the* LEADER.]

LEADER. Mr. Secretary?

MORRIS. I am Mr. Morris, sir.

LEADER. Mr. Morris, this army of Pennsylvania is the dangdest army I've ever seen. They had a chance to eat two Englishmen! Did they do it? No. They said you'd have beans for 'em. Have you got beans, Mr. Secretary? Have you maybe got a BEAN we can divide amongst us? And have you got a few pennies or a piece of an old cigar to pass around? We don't need pants. We've found the best way to scare the British is not to wear pants. And we don't need ammunition. This army'd just as soon fight with its hands—it warms 'em. But, Mr. Secretary, if you don't come out and talk to 'em after they've marched ten miles, I'm afraid there'll be some grumbling.

HAYM. They shall have food and money.

MORRIS. Within the week!

HAYM. They shall have it now.

LEADER. Gosh, mister, there are two hundred of us!

HAYM. Good! There'll be meat and bread and milk for two hundred.

LEADER. You wouldn't fool us, would you?

HAYM. We fight with money, but you with your lives! Rachel, go with him. Show him our place on Front Street and set a time for them to meet.

RACHEL. Yes, Haym.

LEADER. You aren't Haym Salomon, are you? Somebody said if there wasn't anything doing at the Secretary's, you *might* have a handout of grub for us. Do you know what we'll do for you if you feed us and help us along, Mr. Salomon? We'll bring

you the flags of Yorktown—'cause Yorktown will fall, you can bet your life, if we can have something in our bellies.

HAYM. God bless you!

LEADER. God bless you, Mr. Salomon.

RACHEL. Do what you think best, Haym.

[*She presses his hand and goes out with the LEADER.*]

MORRIS. That's a splendid thing to do, Mr. Salomon. I am deeply indebted to you.

HAYM. There is no one greater than a soldier, gentlemen. It is easy to sit at a table and say we will make war—these men face guns and bayonets.

MORRIS. The Bills of Exchange will be delivered to you tomorrow. You hear, Gouverneur?

GOUVERNEUR. Yes, sir.

HOWE. If that money can be directed for the Pennsylvania army, they can join Washington and the flags of Yorktown *will* be ours!

LANDAIS. Haven't I always said that morale won more battles than ammunition?

HAYM. Mr. Morris, you once spoke to me about your Bank of North America which is to be chartered by the Revolutionary Congress. I believe it will lead to a truly National Bank and will serve as a means for obtaining funds to carry on the government. I am depositing today for the government a hundred thousand dollars.

LANDAIS. A hundred thousand!

HAYM. And I shall put at the disposal of the Secretary of Finance a sum of equal amount for the duration of the war.

MORRIS. Mr. Salomon—I am at a loss to thank you. I only hope it will be some reward for you to know that your action may be one of the most decisive factors in this fight for independence. You see what this will do, gentlemen! It will restore public credit, it will inspire our armies, it will raise the cry of "On to Yorktown" that has been in strong danger of dying.

HOWE. My sincere appreciation, Mr. Salomon.

HAYM. Is it more than you did with your fortune in the South, General?

HOWE. In a way, for I have not yet heard you say a word about wanting your contribution to be secured.

HAYM. The cause secures it, sir.

LANDAIS. Now, Mr. Morris, you'll not forget the slight obligation to one Captain Landais?

MORRIS. You'll be paid promptly, Mr. Landais, at the very moment that Congress presents you with a medal for heroism.

LANDAIS. What!

HOWE. Why not let us walk right over and see about it, Captain!

LANDAIS. I don't know whether Mr. Morris is serious or trifling with me!

HOWE. As Mr. MacDougall would say, "Congress will surely do the wrong thing!"

[HOWE escorts LANDAIS off.]

GOUVERNEUR. If I have seemed sceptical, Mr. Salomon—

HAYM. Why shouldn't you? There are any number of brokers I am wary of myself.

GOUVERNEUR. After this I shall first ask whether they have ever been in a British military prison.

HAYM. Or if they belong to the Sons of Liberty, sir?

GOUVERNEUR. Well, I can't go quite that far!

MORRIS. If Gouverneur happens to encounter our *General* MacDougall, Mr. Salomon, may he try and keep him momentarily in the ante-room?

HAYM. He may try, Mr. Morris. [GOUVERNEUR goes. HAYM takes a wallet from his pocket.] To seal my faith until you can come to my office, Mr. Morris. [He lays it on the table.]

MORRIS. To seal your faith, sir!

HAYM. You will find twelve thousand dollars there.

MORRIS. I will make out an item of claim for this at once.

HAYM. Not now, not now. Tell me, Mr. Morris, what did the soldier mean when he said they had a chance to eat two Englishmen?

MORRIS. It is a common practice among the British, when they hear that our soldiers are mutinous, to send emissaries to enlist our men in the British army. They are promised food, clothing, and money. Mr. Salomon, our soldiers, although in revolt and hungry, usually seize these emissaries and order them hanged!

HAYM. And Britain thinks to win the war when we have men like that!

MORRIS. I don't think Britain will win now, Mr. Salomon. But tell me, sir, this two hundred thousand dollars— isn't it practically your entire fortune?

HAYM. It is.

MORRIS. And you put it at my disposal? That is a great trust.

HAYM. Mr. Morris, my physician and I have a secret.

MORRIS. I know. The Provost will have its toll.

HAYM. I have faith in these colonies—this country. It has dealt kindly with me. There is one thing that will surely happen, though it be after my day—and perhaps after your day—these colonies will be united under one flag. That means much to you. It means more to one whose long road has been through Portugal and Poland and Russia and Germany. It means everything to such a one. There is nothing greater for him— One of my happiest moments will be tonight when Rachel and I watch two hundred hungry men eat! Rachel knows—Rachel knows more than she'll say—and when you see her tonight breaking bread, you will understand.

MORRIS. So the wheels are set in motion! [*He opens the wallet.*] There can now be an order for Washington—an order for St. Clair—and an order for Lafayette—

[*The door opens and ALEX comes in wearing a general's hat and a sword. GOUVERNEUR has vainly tried to dissuade him from breaking in.*]

ALEX. Gentlemen!

GOUVERNEUR. I tried, Mr. Morris!

HAYM. Alex, you look wonderful!

MORRIS. Have you changed your mind about Congress, General?

ALEX. They're dumber than I thought. Do you know what they did? They had a prayer! A prayer for Alex MacDougall! Gave me a hat and a sword—and a prayer! If the Sons of Liberty ever hear about that—! I ran all the way back! [*He sees the wallet.*] —Well, Haym? Have you done it?

HAYM. I have, Alex. It is the way I want it to be.

ALEX. [*Turning to MORRIS and GOUVERNEUR.*] Gentlemen, you are dealing with a great and good soul—but one that is mad—mad with the religion of freedom. And his wife just came to tell me she felt whatever he did was right.

HAYM. I knew Rachel would say that!

ALEX. Yes, she's mad, too! Strangest of all, this genius of finance, who has supported generals and government officials, and who will now support armies, will leave his own affairs in a most hapless state! It will be history, gentlemen, that this man, who gave his country everything, will some day die penniless! The government will pay his heirs nothing!

HAYM. Alex, Alex!

MORRIS. That will never happen, General!

ALEX. Mr. Morris, it will happen even to you. It will happen to George Washington, to General Howe, and most of all to one Haym Salomon, whose heart is larger than his purse. Knowing what I say to be true, Haym, do you still want to go through with this?

HAYM. Yes, Alex, I do. For to some men that is a cheap price for liberty.

CURTAIN



# THE CRITICAL YEAR

By

PAUL GREEN

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# THE CRITICAL YEAR

## CHARACTERS

THE TOWN CRIER

PAUL REVERE, *an artisan and veteran of the Revolutionary War*

GRANDMA ORNE

JEEMS AIKENS, *formerly a peddler but now a wealthy merchant  
and politician*

ERIC, *his manservant and bodyguard*

DANIEL SHAYS, *a veteran of the Revolution*

ED MALCOMB

JOHN SCOLLAY

} *Workingmen and also veterans*

A CONSTABLE

THE GOVERNOR

SAM ADAMS, *a patriot, and father of the Articles of Confederation*

JOHN HANCOCK, *a wealthy merchant and former Governor.*

MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL, WORKINGMEN, TOWNSMEN, GUARDS,

MUSICIANS, and OTHERS

TIME: A summer afternoon in the year 1786.

PLACE: A street and house in Boston.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

As many a historian has pointed out, the years immediately following the Revolutionary War were critical ones in the life of the American republic. The monetary system was demoralized, trade disrupted, and inflation and its attendant evils were rampant in the land. However, as in the case of most wars, some individuals had prospered through the woeful times. More than one unscrupulous army contractor had risen from poverty to wealth, and even beggars and peddling sharpers like old "Jeems Aikens" in the following sketch were known to have accumulated fortunes through trading and speculating in cheap soldier certificates, mortgages and other claims. But poverty and suffering were the general rule. Jobs were scarce, taxes exorbitant, and food, clothing and shelter were at a premium, and hundreds of stricken families moved to the Western frontier in search of a better life. Bankrupt New England mechanics and tradesmen migrated into western New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio. And unfortunate Southerners likewise poured across the mountains into Kentucky and Tennessee.

The separate states being head over heels in debt as well as honeycombed with mutual antagonisms and jealousies were unable to alleviate the lot of their suffering citizens. Likewise Congress, which for lack of legislative support after the war had declined in prestige and power, had neither a program nor strength to carry one out. The times were full of peril for the new American system, and civil war seemed imminent. Finally when open rebellion did break out among the common people of Massachusetts and seemed likely to spread to the other states, the former leaders of the nation were awakened, and only then, to the dire necessity of concerted action. Under the leadership of George Washington a convention was called, and thereupon

began the making of the American constitution and the ultimate consolidation of the nation.

In writing this little play I have naturally been more interested in depicting something of the spirit of the times than in following the actual facts of history.

P. G.

## THE CRITICAL YEAR

*The scene is GRANDMA ORNE's poverty-stricken house with a little street before it. We see into the house as if the wall were cut away. At the left rear is a table, a few chairs about, and over at the right center the dark spot of a fireless chimney. In the front foreground at the center are a step and the short stubs of the door lintel about two feet high marking the entrance into the house from the outside. At the left front before the house is the low stump of a once lordly tree with scraggly grass around it. And at the right corner of the house is a leafy peach tree with a watershelf and a bucket under it. A narrow lane of a street runs diagonally from the left front by the stump and out at the right by the peach tree.*

*When the Curtain rises, the forestage is illuminated and the house at the back is in shadow. The sound of an approaching bell is heard off at the left front and the TOWN CRIER comes in. He is an old man, dressed in rather rough outdoor clothes of the times and with flaring white hair. He stands in the center of the scene and gives his bell a ring.*

CRIER. [*Sending forth a high phlegmy call.*] Oh, yes! Oh, yes! His Excellency the Governor of this the Commonwealth of Massachusetts doth order and command that loyal citizens everywhere be watchful and wary of all suspicious characters! [*Ringing his bell again.*] Hear ye! Hear ye, one and all! The Tax Collectors of this the city of Boston do hereby give final warning that all judgmented property shall be sold by public outcry at the next Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions! [*Giving his bell another ring.*] This the twenty-ninth day of August, seventeen hundred and eighty-six and the third year of the peace—all is quiet on the streets of Boston!

*[He goes on out at the right rear by the house, ringing his bell. As the sounds die away, the light gradually comes up, revealing the interior of the room at the back. Before the fireplace at the right sits GRANDMA ORNE, churning in a stone churn. She is an energetic little old woman with thick-piled gray hair. PAUL REVERE is seated at the table reading a book, with a few scattered sheets of foolscap paper, goosequill pens and an inkwell beside him. He is a quiet-mannered man past middle age, dressed in clothes a little better than a workman, and with the marks of sleeplessness and thought upon his face.]*

GRANDMA. *[Halting the up-and-down motion of her churn dasher.]* Well, there he goes braying out the woes and disasters of the world. Did you hear him, Paul Revere? *[She stares irritably around at REVERE. But he makes no answer and she goes on churning, chanting sing-song as she does so.]*

Come butter come,  
For I want some—  
Come butter come.

*[For a moment she works away viciously, then lifting the dasher looks into the churn, after which she slams the lid down and goes on. Her voice rises in anger.]* Here I've been churning for an hour and not a bit 'n grain more butter in that milk than there is sense in them books you're reading. I said did you hear me, Paul Revere? *[Wagging her head.]* But he wouldn't, not if the lightning fell and busted under his feet.

REVERE. *[Abstractedly.]* What is it, Grammer?

GRANDMA. I was just talking to hear my head roar.

REVERE. *[Looking at her.]* I'm not much company to you, I know. *[He begins writing with a quill pen.]*

GRANDMA. You're no company to anybody—with your meetings and connivings with this Daniel Shays. And your writings and your head soused in a book. You better quit it, you had. And is this same Daniel Shays coming back here for another meeting, I'd like to know?

REVERE. Yes, and I'm waiting for him now.

GRANDMA. [*Wrathfully.*] I don't like it, I tell you. And did you hear the Crier sounding forth the Governor's orders?

REVERE. Yes—taxes and suspicious characters—and we'll all be hanged by the neck till dead.

GRANDMA. Make fun if you want to. But you needn't think because you did a lot of riding in the war and they made a hero out of you you can stand against the Governor. [*As REVERE is silent.*] Lord, Lord, here you come across the river to pay me a visit and what sort of visit? Not a word out of you for the whole three days.—Work, work, write, write, write. What's it all about?

REVERE. [*Indulgently.*] Political matters, Grammer.

GRANDMA. Political matters. Aih—that war—that war ruined everything. And what a waste of manhood it was. Joe Warren killed, Ephraim Banks killed, and scores of fine young men never to come marching back to town. And all the good Tories scattered homeless over the world—Poor Governor Hutchinson himself a fugitive beyond the sea and his property sunk into the claws of that old peddler Jeems Aikens. And you yourself—look at you—every dollar you ever had wiped away and your poor children likely to die naked as yard dogs.

REVERE. Not if our leaders listen to us. And they will this time. Daniel Shays is meeting with the Governor this very minute.

GRANDMA. Much good it'll do. Well, we older heads told you how it would be—back in Seventy-Six we did. But you wouldn't listen. Freedom, equality of man—you went crazy as bedbugs, all of you, and fired off your guns at Concord town. [*Churning fiercely for a moment.*] And here I am—I can't get any butter—the cow has to live on weeds I pull from the fence jambs. I wouldn't give one good stack of hay for a world full of this freedom you talk about. Can you eat this freedom? Does it put clothes on your bones? And let me tell you—the quicker we all get down on our knees and beg the King to take us back the better it'll be. And there's a lot of people doing it.

REVERE. Who?

GRANDMA. I ain't naming names. But there's folks in this very town who want their King again.

REVERE. And they're traitors to our cause.

GRANDMA. When a man's hungry he ain't got but one cause—and that's his stomach. [*She springs up and gets a shawl from a peg on the wall by the chimney.*] And mine's empty. I'm going over to Miz John Hancock's and see if I can beg some more meal. Politics or no politics a woman's got to think of dinner. [*She comes on out of the house and starts away at the right, then stops and calls back to REVERE.*] Yonder comes old Jeems Aikens now. He'll want his rent. Ah, Lord!

[*She turns and hurries out at left front. REVERE goes on with his writings. A moment passes and old JEEMS AIKENS comes limping in at the right rear. He is a gnarled, long-shanked and skinny old fellow, but dressed in fine raiment and carrying a gold-headed walking cane. He is accompanied by ERIC, his manservant bodyguard, a stout-looking fellow, who carries a parasol over his master and wears a sword and mean-looking pistol at his belt.*]

OLD JEEMS. [*Muttering.*] Two miles a day and sweat freely—the doctors said. My constitutional—[*Mumbling.*—constitution—constitutional. A most villainous word— Ahm. All for my health. I'll rest a bit here.

ERIC. [*Looking off at the left.*] But, Master, you are due at the Governor's Council. Papers to be sealed.

OLD JEEMS. They can wait, seal or no seal. I'll stamp them another day— [*Sighing.*] If there is another day. [*He comes over and taps the stump with his cane.*] This was once a tree— Liberty Tree it was called till the British rightly cut it down. It had a most marvelous shade. I used to lie under it warm of nights—in my old peddling days I did—and play myself to sleep with my accordion. [*He sinks down on the stump and sighs. His man closes the parasol and stands respectfully away at the left front. OLD JEEMS stares off before him, breathing heavily.*] Hot—hot—I can't get my breath. That's what luxury will

do for a man—takes away his wind—stamina, that's the word. Bah, and used to I could walk my thirty miles a day. Well—we're growing old—times have changed. My good friend Patrick Henry, they say, ain't the man he was either, money or no money. Politics and real estate have got him down in Virginny. Would to merciful heaven something could get this old Sam Adams here in Boston. He pesters me night and day for funds to hire more militia and buy law and order with—hah—hah. Contradictory, heigh? Once he was for the people. Now he's afraid of the people. Ah, what a world! Ain't it so, Eric?

ERIC. It is, master. The world is strange.

OLD JEEMS. Here I am, most marvelous-wise, become a man of wealth and honor and Keeper of the Seal—but no matter. As poor Richard says in his almanac, uneasy lies the head that wears a crown. Ahm—and it gets more uneasy every hour. If they frighten me once more I'm done for, Eric—my heart. [*He stares dolefully off a moment, and then a croaking song rises from his lips.*]

In ancient days I heard it said

A beggar maid and a king were wed—

ERIC. [*Turning plaintively towards his master.*] No, master, I remind you.

OLD JEEMS. Ahm,—you remind me. A rich man must never sing. Only the poor can do that. I must keep my dignity. Well, used to I sang and made up songs. I was happy then. I slept well and enjoyed my crust. Now my stomach's soured on me and I am full of fears. The hungry people look at me queer. I see knives in their eyes. After today wear two pistols, Eric.

ERIC. I will, master.

OLD JEEMS. [*Shaking his head helplessly.*] Not that it'll do any good. Nothing does any good any more. And I am lonely too—I'm lonesome as the graveyard. Ahm—they say the Ohio country is being opened up, Eric. Where's my old accordion?

ERIC. Safe at home, master.

OLD JEEMS. Keep it safe. I feel I'm going to need it. These

times are uncertain and sorrowful beyond belief. Well, John on the Isle of Patmos prophesied such things, and throats will be cut.

ERIC. I will protect you, master.

OLD JEEMS. Thankee, Eric, thankee. [*He rises wearily, stares about him an instant and then moves towards the left front.*] My constitutional—we must keep walking. Come—

ERIC. [*Touching him on the shoulder.*] I remind you—your rent, master. You must give notice.

OLD JEEMS. No, I don't want to think of rent today either. I'll give the poor woman kindly greetings. [*He turns and moves over towards the house. Tapping on the steps with his cane, he calls.*] Good day and blessings on you, Grammer, good day.

REVERE. [*Looking out.*] Kind words are a strange greeting from you, Mr. Aikens.

OLD JEEMS. [*Pleadingly.*] And why is your tongue so sharp and bitter, Paul Revere?

REVERE. Because such men as you still live upon the earth, robbing us—

OLD JEEMS. [*Clapping his hands to his ears.*] No—no, I won't hear any more abuse—no, no— [*As he starts out at the left, DANIEL SHAYS comes in accompanied by ED MALCOMB, JOHN SCOLLAY and several other MEN. They are veterans of the war, most of them, and show signs of wear and tear and the rough usage of the world. OLD JEEMS throws up his hands.*] Ah, Daniel Shays?

SHAYS. [*Stepping in front of him.*] Walking in splendor and we in rags, eh, old buggar? Catch him, men; we'll strip him. [*OLD JEEMS gives a low gurgling shriek, stands frozen with terror an instant and then flees off at the right with the terrified ERIC at his heels, opening his parasol as he runs. SHAYS laughs.*] He won't look any scareder the day we shoot him.

[*He goes on in house, followed by the OTHERS, with the exception of one GUARD, who remains behind on watch at the left.*]

REVERE. [*Looking up as SHAYS enters.*] I'm just finishing the new copy for the *Gazette*.

SHAYS. [*Bitterly, as he pulls a torn document from his blouse and throws it down on the table.*] Good, for there's the old one torn in two.

REVERE. [*Staring at it.*] What's that mean?

SHAYS. [*Dropping down into a chair while the MEN arrange themselves around the room.*] It means the Governor's not going to listen to our petition. He took one look at it, then tore it across and threw it back in my face.

MALCOMB. He did. I was there and saw it.

REVERE. [*Staring ahead of him a moment and then striking the table with his hand.*] The man's mad—mad.

SCOLLAY. He's got a heart like the horn of a bull—hard.

MALCOMB. And he better soften it and be quick about it.

SHAYS. "Take it back with my compliments," he said. "I am still the Governor of this State, not you."

REVERE. But John Hancock's inclined to the people. Did he speak?

SHAYS. No.

MALCOMB. But old Sam Adams—wish you could have seen his face—red as a turkey gobbler's it was. "Traitors, traitors all," he kept saying over and over.

REVERE. [*Fiercely.*] But this petition is right—right, I tell you. He promised to hear it.

SHAYS. Well, they're not going to listen to it no matter how right it is. He's changed his mind. That's clear enough now—and there are other things clear to me too. [*He pulls a pistol from his blouse and sits rubbing it with his sleeve.*]

REVERE. [*Vehemently.*] They can't deny us our rights as free men. We'll go to the Assembly and lay our grievances before them.

SHAYS. And I reckon you won't do that either, for the Governor has just adjourned the Assembly and taken things into his own hands—even the newspapers.

MALCOMB. He has. It was cried from the courthouse steps and we heard it.

SCOLLAY. That's right—adjourned sine die, they said, to meet the Lord knows when. And no treasonable writings allowed hereafter.

[REVERE sits looking at them blankly a moment, then striking the table again, rises and begins pacing the floor.]

SHAYS. And mark my words, tomorrow morning this town will be in the grip of martial law. A secret order has gone to General Lincoln to bring the troops in by break of day. I saw the messenger ride off across the bridge.

REVERE. [*Bitterly.*] Fools! Fools! Can't they see what they're doing!—Ah.

SHAYS. And you and I will be behind bars with hundreds of other suffering fellow-citizens if they catch us. And there we'll rot.

REVERE. [*Shaking his shoulders and running his hands through his shaggy hair.*] They're bringing ruin and desolation down upon this country. [*His voice almost a cry.*] Ruin, I tell you.

SHAYS. And all we fought and bled for seven long years is lost and gone. That's the truth of it.

REVERE. No, I won't believe that. It can't be—all for nothing—no—those long years of suffering—all that you and I have been through—all that thousands of others like us have been through. No, our purpose was right. We the people are right, and the right will win. Somehow it's got to win. We've got to make it win. [*Half to himself as he continues pacing.*] Washington said it might be like this. One night at Valley Forge he did. He said the critical time would be when the war was over.

SHAYS. Yes, and he sits down there at Mount Vernon planting his dogwood trees and riding to the hounds and does nothing about it. Three times you have written to him begging him to use his great influence to get the colonies together, and so have I, Paul Revere, but not a word comes from him.

MALCOMB. [*Wrathfully.*] Yeh, rich as a lord he is. He don't care about us. And many a time we risked our lives for him. Once at Brandywine I jumped in front—

REVERE. He's a careful man—maybe he's watching and waiting— At the proper time he'll—

SHAYS. And when is the proper time if it's not now? Is it when we're dead in the streets like dogs or hanging on the Governor's gibbet for the birds to peck at?

REVERE. [*Suddenly striking his hands together.*] Aye, why don't Washington and the great men down in Virginia do something? All the while death and starvation stalk the streets and highways of the nation. Nation—we have no nation—only a land of thirteen little nations—and selfish ones. We say that in our petition, and we say the truth. [*Picking up the petition and looking at it.*] In the Declaration of Independence it says—Resolved that these colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent states. Why didn't Jefferson say—yes, why didn't he?—These colonies are and of right ought to be a free and independent nation? Maybe the time hadn't come for that—he couldn't take the step then. First independence had to be won. Then the time would come for the creation of a union. Yes, and the time has come—we see it. In this document we so write it down, and it's right, it stands. [*Bowing his head.*] And yet our leaders won't see it.

SHAYS. Oh, yes, we can sit around and use fine words, but it don't do any good. [*In a hard, quiet voice.*] And now I'll say something—this— There's only one thing will make them see the truth—force. [*As REVERE stares at him.*] And I'm ready for it. My people in the Berkshires are ready. I came down here hoping that together we could work out something to avert this trouble. You said we could. But it won't be averted. So be it. I'm going back into the hills now. I have five hundred men waiting my call. In two weeks I can have a thousand. [*Rising.*] Revere, the time has come for action. What words cannot do bullets can.

REVERE. You mean—fight?

SHAYS. [*Nodding.*] You can call it that.

REVERE. Against whom?

SHAYS. Who do you reckon? Against the lawyers, and judges, the blood-sucking capitalists, and all persons whatsoever who put us into prison for debt, who cheat us out of our wages, who take away our cattle and our fields for taxes, who sell the roofs from over our heads—the way the King's officers used to do. We'll take the Government into our own hands.

VOICES. Hear, hear.

REVERE. You mean you would start a civil war? [*Vehemently.*] That's what it would be.

SHAYS. [*Still quietly.*] 'Twould be no worse than it is. If you'd join with us and lead the workers of Boston we'd crack the whip over them. At our meeting last night I told you that. It's so.

REVERE. But it'd mean war, I tell you. Congress—or what there's left of it—might send Washington into the field against us. We'd be slaughtered like rats. [*Jerking his hand behind him.*] There in them books I've read it tells about just such things in Europe—the old army broke up, a new quarrel arising, the comrades in arms of former days killing and hacking each other to death. It's better to starve first.

SHAYS. But people won't starve without fighting.

MALCOMB. That they won't—and I'll be one of 'em.

SCOLLAY. Aye.

SHAYS. We tried to create a government for the people and it'll have to be saved by the people and saved by force of arms—The law—the law! It was made to safeguard the mighty and powerful. The poor and the weak have no defense under it. Well, we have the strength of our hands. We'll use it. [*Rising.*] Tomorrow we begin. Let Boston follow.

VOICES. Hear, hear!

REVERE. Men, we've lived and suffered through these troubled years. Daniel, you and I were together at Lexington, at Bunker Hill you fought. I appeal to you not to attempt this thing. I'm in as sad a plight as any of you—down and out, no job, nothing. But the use of force is wrong. I know it. Many a time I have felt like moving away—to Ohio—and begin life all over again—

forget it all, let this dream die—perish— But I can't—I've got to stay by and work for it—fight for it. Let us go to General Washington, let us get down on our knees to him—begging him to realize the danger—pleading with him to use his great authority to bring the country into a union of strength. That's it—show him that this must be one nation—with one aim—the happiness and security of all the people. That it's no longer a question of Massachusetts first and Virginia last but of all the colonies one and equal, and the welfare of one is the welfare of all—a common democracy. That's the way it's got to be—a government not of states but of the people—and—and—he'd have to see it.

SHAYS. Words, words again.

[*The GUARD outside suddenly gives a sharp whistle and goes into the house.*]

MAN. The constable!

[*The MEN look about them and then stand still.*]

REVERE. We're breaking no law. [*He gathers up the sheets of paper and crams them in his blouse.*]

MALCOMB. Course not, for we're having a prayer-meeting.

SCOLLAY. Music! Music! [*Quickly leading them into a hymn.*]

As thou with Satan didst contend

And didst the victory win—

[*The OTHERS join in.*]

O give us strength in thee to fight,

In thee to conquer sin.

[*The CONSTABLE, a heavy-set man carrying a staff and wearing a pistol, comes in from the left, listens a moment and then enters the house. REVERE and the OTHERS sing more loudly.*]

THE GROUP.

Lord, who throughout these forty days

For us didst fast and pray,

Teach us with thee to mourn our sins

And close by thee to stay.

CONSTABLE. [*With a grin.*] What a meeting of holiness have we herel

THE GROUP.

And through these days of penitence

And weary woeful strife—

CONSTABLE. [*Yelling.*] Stop it!

[*At a gesture from REVERE they ALL stop singing.*]

REVERE. [*As the CONSTABLE starts looking around and poking into corners.*] Have you a warrant to come in here?

CONSTABLE. [*Heavily.*] Don't need it, Master Revere. Search and seizure go with the Governor's new orders. [*Staring around at the silent faces.*] I am to inquire into all suspicious characters and dubious meetings. I know you, Ed Malcomb. But which one is Daniel Shays?

SHAYS. I am. What do you want?

CONSTABLE. Just to have a look at your face.

MALCOMB. This is private property you're trespassing on.

SCOLLAY. And this a peaceful assembly.

CONSTABLE. [*Monotonously.*] Maybe so, but I can see several of you have got pistols under your jackets. Well, I ain't going to bother you now—except to read a little piece. [*Pulling a paper from his pocket, he reads in heavy falling syllables.*] "Let it be known to all and sundry that one Daniel Shays, late Captain in the Continental Army, is ordered to vacate the city of Boston in twenty-four hours. If found within the confines of the town thereafter he will be subject to fine and imprisonment. And further it is ordered that Paul Revere, also late of the Continental Army, shall from this day forth cease all efforts at agitating the people and shall keep the peace, failing which his person shall be seized." [*He sticks the paper back into his pocket.*] That's all until tomorrow.

[*He gives his grin, looks around and then comes out of the house and goes away at the right rear. The GUARD comes out also and takes up his post as before.*]

SHAYS. Twenty-four hours. I want only twenty-four minutes

to be out of this cursed town. And when I return 'twill be with an army at my back.

MALCOMB. And I'll be with you.

OTHERS. Me too, Daniel. }  
Aye, you said it. } [*Together.*]

REVERE. [*Beseechingly.*] Once more I beg you, Daniel— We can think of some way—somehow we will— You and I will go to Mount Vernon to plead with Washington. We'll take this petition. Start now.

SHAYS. [*Shortly.*] And you think he'd listen to two beggars like us? Not hardly, I tell you. I can see him looking at us from his great height and saying in that quiet way, "By what authority do you speak?"

REVERE. And we'll say we speak for the suffering people of Massachusetts and all others like us.

SHAYS. And he'll look at the petition and turn it over and say, "I see no important signature here, no seal of the sovereign State of Massachusetts."

REVERE. Then we must get that seal—

[*He suddenly stops as if startled at his own thought. Borne in on the air come the sounds of a fife and beaten drum. The GUARD looks off towards the left front.*]

GUARD. [*Calling excitedly towards the rear.*] The Governor's coming from Faneuil Hall.

SHAYS. [*Coming quickly out through the door.*] Where?

GUARD. Along the street there.

SHAYS. [*Looking off an instant and then turning back towards the house.*] The Governor's returning to his home. With him are two militiamen and a few of the Council, I think. [*Staring at REVERE significantly.*] I see only two muskets, Paul Revere.

REVERE. Aye, he goes guarded lately, and well he does.

SHAYS. [*With a grim smile.*] But there are eight of us, and we are armed.

SCOLLAY. [*Quickly.*] We'd better scat. We'll meet tonight at the Green Dragon, fellows. Come on.

REVERE. [*As SCOLLAY starts to leave.*] Wait!

SHAYS. [*To REVERE.*] You say we need the stamp of authority on our document. Then let's get it.

SCOLLAY. We'll be hanged, I tell you.

SHAYS. And then our war begins. Stand firm, men. What say you, Revere?

REVERE. [*After a moment's silence.*] Let me speak to the Governor. I'll—I'll plead with him.

[*He pulls the sheets of foolscap from his blouse and comes out of the house. The OTHERS follow, moving over to the right rear and standing in the middle of the little street. SHAYS moves among the men and whispers to them. They nod their heads in agreement. The fife and drum come nearer, and presently the GOVERNOR, JOHN HANCOCK, SAM ADAMS, and two or three members of the Council enter at the left front. The GOVERNOR is an elderly man of medium height, well-dressed, and carrying a book under his arm. JOHN HANCOCK is somewhat younger and much the dandy in his broadcloth and powdered wig. SAM ADAMS, the oldest of all, is poorly dressed, his dank gray hair showing under his old hat, and he walks with the aid of a trembling cane. A BOY in his early teens is playing the fife and a tall cadaverous FELLOW beating the drum. The little cortege is accompanied by two armed MILITIAMEN. The GOVERNOR and his group march straight on across the scene until they see that REVERE and the OTHERS are blocking their way, then he calls out loudly.*]

GOVERNOR. Halt! [*The cortege stops, the fife and drum grow silent, and the MILITIAMEN ground their muskets. The GOVERNOR eyes REVERE angrily.*] What is the meaning of this unseemly action, Master Paul Revere?

REVERE. [*Hesitating, and then with growing firmness.*] Your Excellency, you deny our petition in your council hall. Therefore we beg leave to speak to you in the street.

GOVERNOR. And with good reason you were barred from our

doors. These everlasting pleas were growing obnoxious and breeding discontent. Our patience was exhausted.

REVERE. [*Earnestly.*] But every day the abuses and the sufferings of the people multiply. I tell you, sir, the horrors of civil war are imminent in this country.

GOVERNOR. And do you think as the people's representative we remain in ignorance of the times while you do not?

REVERE. [*Hesitating.*] I don't know.

SHAYS. [*Calling out.*] It would seem so. Or else you'd get busy and do something about our farms, our jobs, our meat and bread and taxes.

MALCOMB. The people are hungry, your honor.

ADAMS. [*Breaking in.*] Hungry—hungry—of course they are hungry. We've all been hungry—What do you think this struggle to build a government is—a picnic—a little matter to be finished in a year or two—something the weak-kneed can forget and surrender up any time they want a piece of bread?

REVERE. But we are only asking that our rights and our needs be considered, Mr. Adams.

ADAMS. They have already been considered. What do you think we labored and sweated month after month for in trying to create the Articles of Confederation? In that immortal document and in our State Constitution derived likewise with sweat and blood your rights are not only considered but they are guaranteed.

MALCOMB. But these guarantees ain't doing us any good.

ADAMS. [*Ignoring him and turning towards the GOVERNOR.*] Your Excellency, shall we proceed?

VOICES. [*Crying out as the MILITIAMEN pick up their guns.*] No! No!

[*And now several PEOPLE, WORKMEN and TOWNSMEN begin to trickle in and join the gathering.*]

REVERE. Mr. Adams, you have been our leader. We followed you into the War for Independence. We know how you feel

about the Articles of Confederation, for you were mainly responsible for them. But we beg you, sir, to hear our pleas. We are only asking for justice.

SHAYS. [*Who now seems anxious to provoke trouble.*] If you don't—we people of the Berkshire hills will do like Ethan Allen over in Vermont—make our own justice.

ADAMS. [*Hotly.*] Justice! And if you attempt this traitorous act you'll get justice indeed. [*He looks at the GOVERNOR.*]

GOVERNOR. [*Sternly.*] Aye, you will—prison bars and a gallows— [*REVERE stands with his head bowed while mutterings and growls rise from the GROUP around him.*] Let this be clearly understood—I will tolerate no show of treasonable rebellion either in my presence or out. In all cases I shall do my duty—even if the gutters of this town run red with blood. Clear the way!

FIRST MILITIAMAN. [*Shouldering his musket.*] Clear the way for his Excellency the Governor!

SHAYS. [*To the MILITIAMAN in a loud voice.*] Put down that gun!

[*The MILITIAMAN stares at him in blank astonishment.*]

GOVERNOR. [*Incredulously.*] You—you— Arrest him! [*SHAYS' men step forward to protect him.*]

HANCOCK. [*Touching the GOVERNOR on the arm and bowing somewhat ironically.*] If I may be permitted a word of advice, Your Excellency, I would take a moment to hear their grievances. After all this is supposed to be a people's government.

ADAMS. [*Muttering.*] The people's friend.

HANCOCK. What's that, Sam?

ADAMS. [*Irritably.*] I said—John Hancock, the people's friend. But remember, John, there's no election till next year. [*HANCOCK shrugs his shoulders.*]

GOVERNOR. [*After an instant of silence.*] Let it be known that I recognize the impropriety of such a meeting and discussion as this in the open street. However, I lower the dignity of my high office for a moment to once more hear your requests. [*Old*

SAM ADAMS *blows his nose wrathfully.*] Beyond that I promise nothing.

[*Several of the PEOPLE applaud and SHAYS and his MEN relax their watchful attitude somewhat.*]

REVERE. [*Smoothing out his foolscap sheets and beginning to read.*] Conscious of the gravity of the times and the distress and discontent throughout this Commonwealth of Massachusetts, therefore we the undersigned members of the people's committee, hoping to escape a civil war that now threatens the country and to establish a sound and lasting government—do most earnestly urge that his Excellency the Governor of this state immediately order—One—that for one year from this date a moratorium be decreed on all home mortgages. Two—that imprisonment for debt shall cease from date and all imprisoned debtors be immediately set free.

ADAMS. Hah!

GOVERNOR. That's against the State Constitution.

REVERE. Three—that the present paper currency be accepted at face value as payment for taxes.

VOICES. Hear! Hear!

REVERE. Four—that veterans of the late war shall have their certificates redeemed dollar for dollar on the basis of silver currency as was promised them at the time of their enlistment.

ADAMS. Hah, hah! Could you do that?

REVERE. [*More loudly.*] Fifth—that immediate steps be taken to ask General Washington to call representatives of all the thirteen states together in a convention—

A VOICE. [*From ONE OF THE COUNCIL.*] Uh-uh—another convention!

REVERE. —for the purpose we respectfully submit—of— One—the organizing of a supreme national government above and prior to the states— Two—the creation of a new national constitution or bill of rights for the people which shall take the place of the present weak Articles of Confederation—and Three—the election or appointing of one man as supreme head of

the government to be designated chairman or president, his powers and duties to be limited and set forth in the said constitution.

VOICES. [*Of REVERE's group.*] Hear! Hear!

GOVERNOR. These are the proposals of mountebanks and dreamers.

REVERE. But these are the ideas being talked everywhere among the people. Only a strong hand can bring unity to this country, sir. We know it.

ADAMS. [*Snapping up his head.*] You men seem to have exceeding short memories. You are advocating a return to what we've just got rid of—to a monarchy, a powerful centralized government—nothing more.

REVERE. We said president. We don't want a king.

GOVERNOR. But a dictator—is as bad as a king.

REVERE. In time of war you placed the affairs in the hands of one man—Washington.

ADAMS. Yes, for strictly military purposes. This is a problem of civil government.

REVERE. But we are facing something worse than war—the ruin of this country.

ADAMS. Not if each state controls its own affairs as we are trying to do here in Massachusetts.

REVERE. [*Slapping the paper in his hand.*] And the states are not doing it. And they cannot do it as separate states. They must unite as one country. As Patrick Henry said long ago—"I am not a Virginian but an American."

ADAMS. But he has learned better since then, thank God, and believes first in Virginia. [*As REVERE starts to read on.*] Not another word. That's enough. [*Turning and addressing the gathering.*] Gentlemen, the principle of freedom and our future progress—[*Old JEEMS AIKENS creeps in from the left, dressed in the garb of a wandering peddler, and sits down on the stump unnoticed. He wears a pack on his back and carries an accordion hung from a string around his neck. He is followed by ERIC, who*

*is weeping silently. ADAMS has continued.*—rests on state sovereignty and that alone. In the Articles of Confederation the states agreed upon certain friendly relationships—and each one is left to its own responsibility as a state. So it should be with us as men. We must be responsible for our own lives and what we make of them. The struggle is hard, we know. But if we sit firm the times will get better. This depression is a normal thing; the ways of commerce will gradually right themselves. We must trust in the future and tighten our belts. [OLD JEEMS *suddenly lets out a cackling laugh. SAM ADAMS grimaces, waits a moment, and then goes on.*] Let us face the facts—the system of government we have set ourselves to build is something the world has never seen before. Like our forefathers we are in truth pioneers. We are trying to prove that a people can and must before it is free learn to govern itself. If we succeed, the nations of the earth will be nearer that ideal of human brotherhood which for a thousand years has actuated mankind—democracy. If we fail—just so much deeper do we cast man back into darkness, cruelty and despair. This is our vision, this our dream.

VOICES. [*From around the GOVERNOR.*] Hear! Hear!

[*Off at the right the sound of a horse's slowing hoofbeats are heard.*]

ADAMS. What these lawless men are advocating would destroy the very basis of economics and trade as well as the principle of individual liberty for which we fought. The same monarchy of iron-handed control would be over us. The states would find themselves bound hand and foot to the chariot of a great moloch of Federal power, and a country of free commonwealths would be forgot. I say unto you, rather than support such a diabolical movement I would suffer my head to be taken from my shoulders. And further I solemnly declare that whoever among you persists in such action the same should be counted a traitor and should suffer death. Gentlemen—

[*He spreads out his arms and is silent as the GOVERNOR and his GROUP applaud. OLD JEEMS lets out his low cackling laugh again,*

*which continues after the applause has died. The ASSEMBLY look at him in a faint show of displeasure, but ADAMS stands with his head sunk on his breast. There is a stir at the right and a letter is handed quickly to SHAYS, who takes it, looks at it and puts it into his pocket.]*

GOVERNOR. Perhaps you have some comment to make, Mr. Hancock—as a member of the Council, sir.

HANCOCK. You have been very generous with time and patience, Your Excellency. I see no reason to hear more.

GOVERNOR. Thank you, Mr. Hancock. [*To the PEOPLE.*] I have heard your resolves, and now I command each and every one of you peacefully to your homes.

MALCOMB. [*Loudly.*] We've got no homes.

Aye, that's the truth.

VOICES. Good for you, Malcomb. } [*Together.*]

You told him.

[*A murmur rises again among the PEOPLE.*]

ADAMS. [*Suddenly shaking his cane in the air.*] Have you no respect for the Governor's high office? Do you dare insult the people's representative?

VOICES. We are the people.

REVERE. Your Excellency, we plead with you—something must be done before it is too late.

SHAYS. [*With sudden boldness.*] We demand your oath, sir, that we shall keep our houses, that these unjust taxes shall be repealed, and our families protected from hunger and starvation.

GOVERNOR. I refuse to treat with you under force.

SHAYS. Then know—that we will fight— I repeat it, sir—we will fight.

GOVERNOR. And I repeat—that whoever lifts an arm against the Government of Massachusetts shall die by the hangman's rope.

SHAYS. [*Pulling the letter from his pocket.*] Then your hangman shall be busy, for one thousand rebellious men have this

morning taken possession of Worcester, stopped all foreclosure sales and driven the judges from the courthouse. [*The GOVERNOR looks about him and then takes hold of SAM ADAMS' arm as if for protection. SHAYS goes on.*] And now the time has come when empty promises are not enough. [*Sternly.*] Your Excellency, we want that paper signed and sealed.

[*ADAMS stares at him in amazement and the GOVERNOR blinks at him uncomprehendingly.*]

GOVERNOR. [*Struggling for words.*] I—I—you—you are out of your wits.

SHAYS. [*Yelling.*] Then we'll get it by force! [*At a sign from him a few of his MEN spring on the two MILITIA-MEN and tear the muskets from their hands. Several OTHERS whip out their pistols and instantly throw a guard around the scene. Some of the TOWNSPEOPLE cry out with fright and crowd towards the GOVERNOR and his COUNCILMEN as if for protection. PAUL REVERE stands silent in the scene, staring before him with cold set face.*]

GOVERNOR. [*His voice choking with grief and rage.*] You—you shall pay for this, Daniel Shays and Paul Revere. I'll hang you high as Haman if it's the last act of my life.

ADAMS. [*Shrilly.*] Ye're all traitors—traitors! [*Lifting his cane, he runs at SHAYS, but it is knocked from his hand. REVERE picks it up and hands it to him. HANCOCK comes over and, taking the sputtering old man by the arm, leads him back to stand near the GOVERNOR. OLD JEEMS suddenly laughs out loud and slaps his bony knees in glee. MALCOMB runs into the house and out again with ink and pen. SHAYS speaks in a loud, clear voice.*]

SHAYS. Sign that paper, Your Excellency, and we'll not hurt you.

[*The TWO MEN with muskets raise them to the ready. SAM ADAMS steps in front of the GOVERNOR and draws his palsied form up straight.*]

ADAMS. Shoot! Shoot and kill me. Fifty years I have lived for

liberty and to die for it in a moment is easy.

HANCOCK. [*In his calm voice.*] Horatius at the bridge, Sam. History ought to record that dying speech.

[ADAMS' *weak form gradually wilts down and he leans heavily on his stick.*]

REVERE. [*Quietly.*] It seems we must bow to the will of the majority, Your Excellency. I beg you to sign it.

[*The GOVERNOR shakes his head and glares at him in silence.*]

HANCOCK. [*Always the man of coolness and ease, and now more so that his CONFRERES are upset.*] Well, gentlemen, it looks as if this might become tragic after all. To help prevent it I will lead the way. [*Taking the pen from MALCOMB he signs the paper with a flourish.*] There in big round letters marked approved and signed with my own "John Hancock." The King once wanted to hang me for that same signature.

ADAMS. [*With a squeal.*] You're betraying this state, John Hancock!

HANCOCK. [*To REVERE, ironically.*] I presume this document will go to his Lordship, General Washington.

REVERE. I hope so.

HANCOCK. Well, he'll get the significance of this.

GOVERNOR. [*Iratelily.*] And I'll send a message post-haste to deny it.

HANCOCK. That will but confirm the gravity of the situation. The news will run through the states like wildfire. [*As if quoting.*] The people in Boston have risen—capture the Governor—force him to sign a decree— Ah, Washington would act. He always needs somebody to provide a program and you men have provided it.

ADAMS. Are you telling them what to do, John Hancock? It's monstrous!

HANCOCK. Go ahead and sign it, Governor. These boys mean business. Tomorrow when the soldiers come it'll be your turn. [OLD JEEMS *suddenly sounds out a chord on his accordion and*

*stands up on the stump. EVERYBODY looks at him in astonishment.]*

OLD JEEMS. [*In a high quavering voice.*] You'd better sign it, Governor. I'm here to tell you that. [*A murmur runs around the scene, and voices are heard saying, "Who is he?"*] OLD JEEMS *looks grimly out at the crowd.*] You don't know me, do you? Well, I hardly know myself for the wonderful feeling that's in me all of a sudden. Look up, Governor, and see me—I'm a member of your Council—I was, I mean.

GOVERNOR. Silence—old beggar!

OLD JEEMS. Beggar, is it? Well, know that I am The Honorable James Aikens of your cabinet and the keeper of the state seal—most wonderfully changed and for the better. Twenty years have dropped from my shoulders.

[*The PEOPLE gasp, and the GOVERNOR and his GROUP stare at him.*]

VOICES. He must be mad.

OLD JEEMS. Was mad, you mean, for now I've come to my senses, thank God. And I advise you to do what Daniel Shays tells you. You might as well face the facts. That's a thing I learned on the roads before I became a self-made man—to look facts squarely in the face. And the main fact here is money. [*Gesturing.*] Down in New York they won't accept Massachusetts paper money for produce, and New Jersey won't accept Maryland money, and Maryland won't accept Virginia money. And they've all set up toll gates and tariff walls between them, and they call for gold and silver, and there ain't no gold and silver. So it's all in a tangle. And so I say on a money basis these fellows are right, and the quicker you get Washington or somebody to call the states together to discuss ways and means the better it'll be. And when you get the money matter straightened out the rest of this business of liberty will follow. [*As ADAMS starts to speak.*] Shut up, Sam Adams, I hate your lard. [*Pulling a stamp and pad out of his old coat.*] And to help things along,

like John Hancock I'll do my bit. [*He steps over to REVERE, who still holds the petition in his hand.*] This the great seal of Massachusetts with all its authority. Take your petition to Washington, and may the republic flourish! [*He stamps the document.*]

GOVERNOR. [*Springing forward.*] Stop it!

OLD JEEMS. [*Throwing the stamp and pad at him, which one of the COUNCILMEN picks up.*] And now I resign my high office and leave you to your troubles. I'm walking out of these woeful times into the free and happy West. I give up all my possessions and take to the road again. [*Tossing a little bag over to REVERE.*] There's a bit of gold for you, Master Paul Revere. You'll need it. And to you, John Hancock, the keys to my boxes and papers. Divide all among the poor and let my tenants keep their dwellings. Money ain't worth being scared all the time. [*He hands a bunch of keys to HANCOCK, who takes them with a smile and a bow. A murmur rises among the PEOPLE and then breaks into cheers. OLD JEEMS gazes about him.*]

PEOPLE. Rah! Rah! Jeems Aikens! Aikens!

[GRANDMA ORNE comes in at the right rear, looks uncertainly around, and then sidles fearfully into the house.]

OLD JEEMS. And now, Daniel Shays, let the Governor go. You don't need him.

[SHAYS waits a moment, thinking, and then gestures for his MEN to stand aside.]

GOVERNOR. [*Fiercely.*] I call on all the people to witness—that—that I protest this insult—I protest. Go to your homes—[*Loudly.*] Disperse!

[*The PEOPLE begin leaving the scene, and he moves off right, followed by the quaking form of old SAM ADAMS, JOHN HANCOCK, and the OTHERS. The fife and drum begin timidly again, and then continue more firmly as the cortege goes away at the right.*]

SHAYS. [*Quickly.*] And now back to the hills, men. Farewell,

Revere. We'll wait the news. Pray God it's good.

REVERE. Aye, and it will be good. This time Washington will be convinced. He will act to save the nation, and he will save it.

SHAYS. [*As OLD JEEMS begins trying out his accordion softly.*] One of my men has a horse tied there beyond the shed. Take him. All right, double quick, march!

[*The MEN start hurrying away at the left. REVERE grabs SHAYS' hand, then turns and dashes into the house. SHAYS follows after his MEN. Snatching up a coat, REVERE kisses GRANDMA on the top of the head, then stands suddenly still, his hand resting affectionately on one of the old woman's angry, shaking shoulders.*]

REVERE. [*His voice happy and triumphant.*] And now, Grammer, our troubles will soon be over. [*Loudly as he stares before him.*] Today marks the beginning of one union, one people forever!

[*He bends, kisses her head again and then comes out and runs off at the right. GRANDMA ORNE looks about her and then seizes upon the churn handle as if for protection and starts churning away.*]

OLD JEEMS. [*Sending forth a croaking call as he sits on the stump.*] A ch'ice selection of jewelry and delictable ladies' tokens! Irish linen, Manchester checks, chintz patterns and sheetings! Also Doctor Mather's latest sermons!

[*He falls to coughing and sputtering. ERIC, who has been standing by, bends over him, fanning him with his hand.*]

ERIC. [*Piteously.*] Oh, master, master!

OLD JEEMS. Oh, master, master. [*Yelling.*] Leave me! [*ERIC seizes his hand and covers it with kisses. Then as OLD JEEMS gives him a wrathful push, he goes sorrowfully and weeping away at the left. OLD JEEMS rises stiffly to his feet and begins playing his accordion a little more loudly. Moving towards the right, he lifts up his voice in wheezy but happy song.*]

In ancient days I heard it said

A beggar maid and a king were wed,

A fan, a gown, and a jeweled comb  
Were the tricks he used for to fetch her home—  
All in the olden, olden time.

*[He goes on out of the scene, his song gradually dying away. And now the sound of a bell is heard off at the right front, and the old CRIER comes in.]*

CRIER. *[Ringing his bell and sending forth his high phlegmy call.]* Oh, yes! Oh, yes!—this the twenty-ninth day of August, seventeen hundred and eighty-six—and all is quiet on the streets of Boston!

*[He turns and goes out at the left front, ringing his bell. Inside the house GRANDMA ORNE churns viciously away, her voice rising in defiant sing-song as she works.]*

GRANDMA.

Come butter come,  
For I want some—  
Come butter come.

*[Wrathfully.]* One people forever! Bah—it'll never happen.  
*[The light begins to die down on the forestage, and the scene at the rear blacks out.]*

CURTAIN

# CONFAB WITH CROCKETT

By

CARL CARMER

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**CONFAB WITH CROCKETT**

**CHARACTERS**

**ANNOUNCER**

**BOB SMITH**

**DAVY CROCKETT**

## CONFAB WITH CROCKETT

ANNOUNCER. This station is now proud to present a program from America's most far-flung point and I want to tell you, ladies and gentlemen, it's quite a thrill for my guest here and me to take part in a sponsored broadcast that makes necessary the longest auxiliary hookup ever used by a radio station. I once did an interview with a couple of young honeymooners at Niagara Falls. And we had a wire right out to the ledge where the river takes the plunge. You know—to catch the roar of the falls as a background—and I thought that was *something*, but it's nothing compared to this, believe me. Well, I seem to be doing all the talking when I ought to be introducing Bob Smith, my young friend here. Last Wednesday the boys and girls of Henrytown High School elected Bob to come along with me on this trip. He plays left forward on the basketball team and he's second vice president of the student body. He's on the debating team, too—quite a fellow. Now Bob, I guess that's enough introduction. Suppose you step up to the mike—a little closer—and tell the folks listening how we got here.

BOB. Well, it's been a long trip all right—first by bus and then by an old Model T and then on foot carrying the wire and the mike—I'm pretty tired—might not have made it if—

ANNOUNCER. Shucks, we didn't do so bad—and we're here—that's the important thing. Just take a look around, Bob, and tell us what it's like.

BOB. It's pretty hard to talk about—it's higher up than I've ever been or even dreamed anybody could be. I guess the mike brings you the sound of wind blowing. It's a cold wind. We're standing on a rock ledge and I can see clouds down

below us and there is a place where there aren't clouds but it's scary to look at—for you can't see the bottom. This is a lonely place—the loneliest I've ever been in.

ANNOUNCER. He's absolutely right, ladies and gentlemen. That's just the way it looks. This station is both humble and proud to be the first in America to broadcast from the highest and most distant spot in this man's country—a spot that few ever see until they come to it—but everybody comes to it sooner or later—the jumping-off place. Now Bob—you tell 'em why we're here.

BOB. Well, on certain days—Fourth of July and Decoration Day and like that—some folks say that fellows who've made the jump that everybody has to make can come back here—you know—like when the movies run a picture of a high dive backwards just for fun.

ANNOUNCER. And Henrytown High elected Bob to interview anybody we can get up out of this bottomless valley in front of us. Sounds sort of silly—maybe it's just a superstition, but we thought we'd try it—in the interests of science and history and all that. Now we're here I'm not sure what we're supposed to do to get someone to talk to—say some spell or something—or what—

BOB. I'd just holler.

ANNOUNCER. What?

BOB. Holler. I'll bet that's all we need to do—like this—Halloo—Hallooo—down there. Can anybody hear me? Halloo.

CROCKETT. [*From far down below.*] Halloo—oo.

ANNOUNCER. By gosh, it worked, folks. We really got an answer. And now I can see a figure—a tiny one, it's so far down there, but it's getting bigger. It's coming this way. It's a tall, lanky fellow in a fringed buckskin coat like you've seen in the pictures in the history books. He's sailing through the air mighty fast! Here he comes! He's *here!* Right beside us.

CROCKETT. Howdy, strangers!

ANNOUNCER. Why, how do you do?

BOB. Hi, mister. Glad to see you. Is it all right to ask who you are?

CROCKETT. I'm the yaller blossom o' the forest, the pride o' the Nollychucky— Name o' Crockett.

BOB. Crockett—not Davy Crockett—Crockett of the Alamo?

CROCKETT. Crockett o' the canebrake and the U. S. legislater—the coonskin Congressman from Tennessee.

BOB. I don't know so much about that—but there was a Davy Crockett who was killed at the Alamo.

CROCKETT. That's me, too.

BOB. Crockett of the Alamo! I never dreamed I'd talk to Crockett of the Alamo.

CROCKETT. Look here, young fella—what's all this about me and the Alamo? I was there—sure—with a lot of other good men.

BOB. But you gave up your life there in the greatest battle against odds in all American history. Not one of you was left alive.

ANNOUNCER. And let me interrupt right here to remark *what* a triumph. Our sponsors and this station are jointly moved to point out that we are the first on any network in the world to broadcast the authentic voice of Davy Crockett of the Alamo, hero of one of the most famous battles in American history. As the poets have it—Thermopylae had her messenger of defeat—the Alamo had none. Crockett and the little band of less than two hundrd with him inside the old mission building in San Antonio fought off four thousand of the enemy until every last defender of the Alamo was dead.

CROCKETT. Is that so? Jest from the way ye talk, I sorta git the idea ye don't know what ye're talkin' about. You'd be surprised how thunderin' alive I am right now and what's more, I'm livin' in two worlds at once—yours and mine—

BOB. I don't believe I understand you, Mr. Crockett—I . . .

CROCKETT. If I weren't still alive in your world you wouldn't

keep on hollerin' about Crockett of the Alamo—now would you?

BOB. But, Mr. Crockett. You don't seem to like our calling you that—and I don't see why.

CROCKETT. I don't exactly mind it—but I can think of a chance of other things I'd as soon be remembered for.

BOB. Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.

CROCKETT. What's that lingo? Sounds like Choctaw.

BOB. It's Latin—I just learned it in Miss Steel's Latin class at Henrytown High and it means: It is a fine and fitting thing to die for one's country.

CROCKETT. I never said it wasn't, did I? I couldn't say it in fancy language but them's my sentiments. Thar we stood with a whole army acomin' after us. I was singin' a right purty song—"Will You Come into the Bower?"—and every time I pulled Old Betsy's trigger at least one o' Santy Anny's boys bit the dust. "Be sure you're right—then go ahead," I says to myself for the last time in this world (that was between verses of the song). I had nine layin' around me when I quit singin'. Next thing I knew, here I was on this very spot—at the jumpin'-off place—and all set for a leap.

BOB. That was wonderful. I wish I could have a glorious death like that—fighting to the end for my country—dying for what I believe in.

CROCKETT. The last thing a feller does in this world ain't all there is to it. The whole kit and kaboodle o' men don't get a lick at dyin' noble like you say I done.

BOB. I know. I'd like the chance, though.

ANNOUNCER. I'm sure you'll agree, Mr. Crockett, that Bob's courage and his wish to sacrifice his life as a member of the armed forces is highly commendable.

CROCKETT. Waal, mealy-mouth, I reckon ye an' this boy here need to do a little more thinkin'—not that it ain't a fittin' and proper and inspirin' thing to have yer sign taken in when you're blazin' away at the enemy.

ANNOUNCER. [*Heartily.*] Don't you feel you'd better explain that to Bob, Mr. Crockett? I'd hate to have our audience think that—

CROCKETT. Be sure you're right—then go ahead. That's my motto. It don't take no audience into account. I don't see no audience but if there be one I'll say this to 'em: What I was tryin' to tell Bob here when mealy-mouth stuck in his oar is this. Dyin' for your country an' livin' for it generally adds up to about the same thing. If I was to give this boy a piece o' my mind right now I'd say live fer your country as if the bullet with yer name on it was jest turnin' the corner. Live fer it as if every move ye make was goin' to be yer last in the world yer in. Sometimes dyin' fer yer country is an easier job. Nobody at the Alamo done any complainin'. We knew what was comin' an' we took it.

BOB. What was the hardest thing you ever did, Mr. Crockett?

CROCKETT. Let's see, now—I've had some pretty ornery jobs—but I reckon the meanest one was speakin' up in the Congress of the United States an' tell'n 'em whar I stood on the bill that broke our treaties with the injuns in Georgia an' drove 'em off their good land. Even old Hickory—President Andy Jackson—was fer the bill to git them rich bottom lands away from the Creeks and Cherokees. I'd rather be an old coon dog belonging to a poor man in the forest, I says, than belong to any party that will not do justice to all. It's all wrong—it's not justice. If I was the only man in the United States who disapproved of it I would still vote agin it—'an that was the hardest job I ever did. It beat the Alamo all hollow. I said my piece for what I thought—agin my friends an' my enemies. That was harder—livin' fer my country when I was stark alone—than dyin' at the Alamo with a hunderd and eighty o' my friends around me an' the whole country shoutin' my praises. I got the daylights licked out o' me both times but I fit all the way—because I loved my country an' wanted her to do the right thing. That's what I call livin' fer yer coun-

try—usin' yer brains and yer heart an' yer voice an' everything else ye got to keep her inchin' forrard in the way she ought to go.

BOB. I suppose you're right, Mr. Crockett, but I wish I could be a soldier right now, with a gun fighting our enemies.

CROCKETT. Plenty o' time, my boy, plenty o' time. The way things keep on goin' ye may be yet. But if ye don't—if'n we lick 'em afore ye get into a uniform, be sure ye've lived these days right now in the way ye can best help the country. You're in school—do yer best at larnin'. Git to have some brains that are licked into shape to help out when the time comes to use 'em. A feller can live for his country a tarnation sight o' ways these days—by gittin' up an hour early to plow a few extry furrows in the springtime—by stayin' in the harvestin' field in the fall till the light goes, by mendin' fences and by milkin' cows—by workin' hard—yes—an' by playin' hard. An' by helpin' folks save the things we need to win a war bigger even than Crockett ever fit in. It's tough goin' an' it ain't excitin', but I know ye want to do it. Ye'll git tired usin' yer brain an' yer hands, so bushed and so riled ye'll want to quit—but if I know ye an' all the boys like ye—ye *won't* quit. It takes gumption—sand in your craw—the same kind that the boys had at the Alamo—but it lasts ever an almighty longer time. Keep everlastingly at it. Waal, here I be soundin' like a canebrake preacher. I've said my say. I'll be startin' back.

ANNOUNCER. Don't go, Mr. Crockett—at least until I've had a chance to thank you in the name of this station and our sponsor, who has so generously given up his usual program time on the air to this interview.

CROCKETT. Sponsor—eh? I don't know what that means, mealy-mouth, but if it means what I think it does, I'll have you know I wear no man's collar. Davy Crockett's time and air ain't for sale. They're free as the piece o' sunrise I got in my pocket.

BOB. Don't go, Mr. Crockett. There are so many things I

want to ask you.

CROCKETT. I've got to be goin'. Remember what I said to ye, Bob. Live everything ye do these times fer yer country. If ye get a sudden call to the jumpin'-off place, ye'll want her to know that yer last thought afore ye got to this spot was fer her. Now you two pick up yer roll o' wire and git away from this edge here. I'm goin' one way and you're goin' another. I'll see ye both one o' these days—way down thar at the end o' the jump—when yer time comes to make it.

ANNOUNCER. He's gone. He's floating down through the clouds. Now we can see him in the place where there are no mists—he's a little spot in the sunlight—far down there and still getting smaller—now we can't see him any more.

BOB. Goodby, Mr. Crockett—I'll remember.



# MOONSET

By

HELEN M. CLARK

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## MOONSET

### CAST

GREGORY, *Captain, about 25 years old*

PETER, *Lieutenant, about 30 years old*

NEIL, *Lieutenant, about 19 years old*

GILLIS, *private, about 40 years old*

MOFFATT, *private, about 25 years old*

THE STRANGER, *Captain, about 30 years old*

All characters are English soldiers of the rank indicated. Their uniforms are those worn by the English Army in Mesopotamia or Palestine during the World War. The Stranger's uniform is without insignia.

TIME: During the World War.

SCENE: A battle front.

*Moonset* was a prize-winner in the 1938 Peace Playwriting Contest sponsored by the Religious Drama Council of the Greater New York Federation of Churches, and was produced with great success at the Temple of Religion, New York World's Fair, May 30, 1939.

## MOONSET

*At rise, the stage is in darkness. Then a faint beam of moonlight appears at right of the stage. It seems to shine in through a cleft between two huge, dark rocks, rocks that are felt rather than seen. The rest of the stage is black, but there is a suggestion of a place of many rocks, of tense silence, and of waiting, unseen danger.*

GREGORY *is standing in the faint light. He is leaning against the rock behind him, and watching off right. Presently PETER speaks softly out of the darkness below him.*

PETER. Greg!

GREGORY. [*Not moving.*] That you, Peter?

PETER. Yes. I'm coming up. [*He comes out of the gloom into the faint light, standing behind GREGORY.*]

GREGORY. Well?

PETER. Thought I'd report I'd been about and everything's in order. I'll stand watch for you now, if you like.

GREGORY. Thanks. Not necessary. I'm all right.

PETER. You'd better go sleep a bit.

GREGORY. Why?

PETER. You haven't had any sleep in two nights, you know.

GREGORY. That doesn't matter now, does it? Only a few hours of this left—and then . . . They say the dead rest a long time, Peter.

PETER. Um. Perhaps. I wouldn't know, of course. [*He moves forward a little.*] Odd, how beautiful this wady is in the moonlight.

GREGORY. Beautiful? A death-trap beautiful!

PETER. Isn't it? White rocks, white sand, clear black shadows with an undertone of blue, like a bit of another world—a

moonscape, for instance. Just as dead and just as still. You could hear the proverbial pin, if one of those Arab chaps out there had a pin to drop. You know, I believe that moon's going to set right in the cleft between the wady walls as neatly as a penny dropped in a slot.

GREGORY. Moonset in less than two hours—then daylight, and the end—for us.

PETER. Oh, I don't know about that. Something might happen. If we can hang on, the others may get through to us.

GREGORY. Not in time. It means pushing too much out of the way first. Besides, they probably think we're done for by now. We should be, at that.

PETER. Wait! [*He tenses, leaning forward, listening, staring right.*]

GREGORY. What is it?

PETER. [*Turns his head slowly, looks left into the shadows, then back at GREGORY.*] Queer! I thought I heard something—a strange sound, like the single note of a bell.

GREGORY. There's nothing. You could hear a spider crawl over a stone down there.

PETER. There's something about this night, something odd. I can't define it, but I felt it about an hour ago when the Arabs stopped shooting at us and the silence began. It's in the silence, and yet it doesn't seem to be a sixth-sense warning of danger. Still—I wonder what they are up to out there in the silence.

GREGORY. They won't attack before daylight. Perhaps not then.

PETER. Well, at least we have three advantages. Fortified height, no rear to defend—always approved by the military manuals—and we must be attacked on a narrow front—also approved.

GREGORY. [*Shrugs impatiently.*] They don't have to attack and they know it. A few more hours of sun and thirst will finish us, like poor Moffatt down there. How is he?

PETER. Quiet—now. And I hope he stays tied this time. [*He looks left again, then back.*] Our one disadvantage is no water. If we had that, I believe we could hold on here indefinitely.

GREGORY. If! If! If! Ten of us against a thousand or so!

PETER. Nine—now.

GREGORY. [*Turns to look at him.*] Layton?

PETER. Half an hour ago. I did what I could, but . . .

GREGORY. [*Touching his forehead wearily.*] Comstock at dusk—and now Layton. And—and Neil?

PETER. Still being awfully brave. [*He sits below GREGORY at right.*] Did you ever stop to consider, Greg, what a strange code we men live by, that we must bear the absolutely unbearable in silence, believing that if we cry out we're cowards? Women are so much wiser than we are. They know the relieving value of tears.

GREGORY. Neil's only a kid. He ought to be back home—being a kid—instead of lying over there, dying. [*He looks at PETER.*] I suppose you're wondering why I stick out here instead of over there—with him.

PETER. I wasn't—no.

GREGORY. He always looked up to me back home. Thought I was quite all right, and all that. I—I brought him up to that—that code, as you call it. Believed it, myself. He won't cry out because he thinks I wouldn't; that's why I don't dare stay with him. I—I'm not as strong as I thought, Peter.

PETER. I understand, Greg.

GREGORY. It was bad enough about the others, but I could be a bit impersonal, detached—told myself the ideal for which they died compensated for the sacrifice; but now that it's Neil, somehow it's all hollow, Peter, all I believed—that code—everything. I can't find anything to hang on to—to help me. Nothing's real except—Neil's dying.

PETER. The last of realities, the most inevitable . . .

GREGORY. He'd have a chance yet, if we could get him to a doctor—might not even lose that leg. Oh, what's the use? I

can't get him out of this; I can't stop the pain, do anything for him except let him lie there—like that. I can't even give him a drink of water.

PETER. He hasn't asked for one since I told him there was none. Part of that code, of course. But there's something he needs more than water and that's morphia. Wish I had it for him.

*[Out of the darkness somewhere to the left there comes a laugh, a crazy, horrible laugh. It rises to a sort of mad shriek, then sobs itself into silence.]*

PETER. And morphia for Moffatt, too. Incredible, the strength of madness. He keeps working out of his bonds someway, no matter how tight we make them; and he's dangerous loose. Nothing left in his poor mind but an impulse to kill. He nearly strangled poor Williams on his last escape. Williams is standing guard over him with his gun in his hand now.

*[The laugh rises again, wildly, and ends in wretched, audible gasps, like a terrible sobbing.]*

GREGORY. I wish he wouldn't do that!

PETER. *[Rising.]* I wish—for your sake, Greg—that he wouldn't. You can't stand much more, can you?

GREGORY. I can't break, Peter! I can't! I've got to stick it! I've got to! I can't let go . . .

PETER. *[His hand on GREGORY's arm.]* Easy, old man!

GREGORY. *[With a long breath.]* All right, Peter. Sorry.

GILLIS. *[Speaks out of the darkness below them.]* Captain? Sir?

GREGORY. Yes, Gillis?

GILLIS. *[He comes into the light.]* It's your brother, sir. He wants you to come to him—if you can.

GREGORY. But I . . .

PETER. Better go, Greg.

GREGORY. I . . . will you come with me, Peter?

PETER. Of course, if you're sure that you want me to.

GREGORY. Please. [*He moves down past PETER to GILLIS.*] Get up there, Gillis, and watch. Keep your eyes right on that gap and that moon.

GILLIS. Yes, sir. And if I see something?

GREGORY. There won't be anything—until dawn.

GILLIS. And—and then, sir?

GREGORY. And then? [*Shrugs.*] That's very simple. We'll shoot until our ammunition's gone, after which we'll all die like Englishmen, of course.

GILLIS. Yes, sir. [*He moves past GREGORY, then turns.*] There—there ain't no chance of them back there getting to us, is there, sir?

GREGORY. Not one in ten thousand. So stop wishing.

GILLIS. Yes, sir. I wasn't exactly wishing, sir. I know it'll take a blooming miracle to save any of us. But—but—I'm only asking, sir, because my old woman back home, she do take great stock in it, sir—do you suppose that praying might help?

GREGORY. I—I don't know. Won't hurt. Try it, if you like, while you're on watch. Only keep your eyes open while you're at it.

GILLIS. Yes, sir. If only there was something could get us out of here. I—I got a bit of a girl at home, sir—curls she has, and big brown eyes . . .

GREGORY. You'd better get up there, Gillis.

GILLIS. Yes, sir. [*He moves into the position GREGORY occupied at first, and stands there, looking off left, his gun held across his leg.*]

GREGORY. Come, Peter.

[*PETER comes down, and he and GREGORY disappear into the shadows at left. For a few seconds we watch GILLIS in the beam of moonlight. Then the light fades out to blackness. This holds a few more seconds, and then a faint, murky glow comes on near center of stage. It shows NEIL, lying on a low rock shelf beneath an overhang. He wears no coat, for his tunic is*

*folded under his head. The lower part of his body is covered with a blanket. He is lying with his face turned from the audience.*

*As the murky light dims, GREGORY and PETER are heard talking in the darkness as they find their way through the rocks, coming from the right.]*

PETER. Somehow you wouldn't consider Gillis as the repository of the sort of faith that moves mountains, and yet—there's his bit of a girl—and one can do much for a bit of a girl.

GREGORY. There are no miracles left in the world, Peter.

PETER. Oh, I wouldn't make it as sweeping as that. Trouble is, miracles usually happen when most of us are looking the other way, and then we scoff to excuse our inattention. Go by Moffatt quietly. Any disturbance makes him violent.

*[There is a faint, mad chuckle off right.]*

GREGORY. Don't go to sleep there, Williams, while you're holding your gun in your lap. If he got loose again . . .

VOICE. Yes, sir. I'll be careful, sir.

PETER. Watch your head going in under this rock, old man.  
*[GREGORY and PETER come into the dim light from the right.]*

GREGORY. Neil!

NEIL. *[Turning his head; he speaks slowly and with an effort.]* Hello, Greg! Back again, Peter?

*[GREGORY, going left, kicks an empty water bottle lying on the ground. He picks it up, looks at it.]*

PETER. Thought I told you to sleep, Neil.

NEIL. I know. I tried. But I couldn't. It's so hot under here—this night's so long.

PETER. Soon be morning. Give me that empty water bottle, Greg. I'll put it over here.

GREGORY. Ought to throw it away. It's useless. *[Hands it to PETER, who sets it at right.]*

NEIL. Could you—fix this coat—under my head, Peter? It's so uncomfortable.

PETER. Let's see. [*He adjusts the tunic.*] Better?

NEIL. Yes, thanks—oh! [*Pain grips him.*]

GREGORY. Neil!

PETER. Steady, boy, steady. That's it; hang on to me.

NEIL. [*Clings to PETER's hand, gasping, turning his head from side to side, until the pain passes and he lies limp.*] That—that was a bad one, wasn't it?

PETER. Yes. You'd better not talk any more.

NEIL. I have to talk to Greg, Peter. But—would you mind if—if just he and I . . .

PETER. Not at all. I'll go and prowl about. Stay here as long as you like, Greg. I'll take charge. [*He goes into the shadows at right. There is a silence.*]

NEIL. Greg?

GREGORY. Yes, old man?

NEIL. Greg, do you remember how we used to lie out on the moor sometimes, on summer afternoons, looking at the clouds? You'd put your arm under my head . . .

GREGORY. Yes. I remember.

NEIL. Would you mind—now? This coat's so darned uncomfortable!

GREGORY. I can't lie down beside you, old man. No room on that rock. But I'll sit there at the end if you like—and let you use my lap as a pillow for a bit.

NEIL. Please.

GREGORY. [*Sitting at NEIL's head.*] Rather tight quarters under this rock. [*Lifts NEIL's head to his lap.*] Now, how's that?

NEIL. Better. Greg?

GREGORY. Yes?

NEIL. This will end—in a few hours—won't it?

GREGORY. Yes.

NEIL. And then . . .

GREGORY. [*Feels beside NEIL and brings a revolver into the light.*] Your gun's here, beside your coat. After we're gone, and they come—you know what to do.

NEIL. I know.

GREGORY. It'll take courage, old man.

NEIL. I know. But I can. It's what you'd do.

GREGORY. I—wonder. [*He puts the gun back.*]

NEIL. I'm rather glad it's almost over, aren't you?

GREGORY. Yes.

NEIL. I—I've been thinking of home, Greg.

GREGORY. Yes?

NEIL. It helps—when things get hard. Funny what I'll remember. Crawling through the hedge to hunt rabbits in the meadow. The hawthorne along the lane, all in bloom, and how it smelled in the rain. And the moor, green and purple miles of it, and the shadows the clouds made—moving across. And how we used to gallop over it, you and I. Fun, wasn't it?

GREGORY. Yes.

NEIL. Riding with the wind in our faces, so sharp and clean. Sometimes it smelled of wet heath, sometimes of the sea. Remember the mists that came in from the sea, gray and cool and salty?

GREGORY. Yes.

NEIL. And the river, so still—green in the sun. The pool by the birches where we'd bathe. The water was black and cold. Remember the time we went in with the storm coming, how we floated there looking into the sky, watching the clouds piling up and the lightning ripping across—jolly, wasn't it?—until the rain came?

GREGORY. Yes.

NEIL. And we rode home through it and we were dripping when we got there. And the look on mother's face when she saw us through the window . . . [*He ends with a choked gasp, hiding his face suddenly in the crook of his elbow.*]

GREGORY. Neil! What is it? Neil, old man!

NEIL. I can't, Greg! I can't be brave any more. I've tried—I've tried . . .

GREGORY. Don't, Neill

NEIL. I've tried, but it hurts so. Greg, I want to go home! I want to go home! I want—mother.

GREGORY. Neil, please . . .

NEIL. I—I want—mother, Greg.

GREGORY. If I could get you back to her by paying my life, I'd do it. You know that. But—I can't.

NEIL. I—I know. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be a—a baby. I just remembered—too much.

GREGORY. I understand, old man. It's all right.

NEIL. Don't say anything, please.

GREGORY. No one will ever know but me. Here, take this handkerchief.

NEIL. Thanks. Greg, what good does it do—what help is it to England, to anybody—for us to die here—like this?

GREGORY. I'm afraid—none, old man.

NEIL. None. Somehow you see that when you're this close to the end. Somehow you wouldn't mind if you thought it did help, but . . .

GREGORY. We march and march and die and die  
To satisfy the lords of men,  
Who only grow dissatisfied  
And make us march and die again.

NEIL. What's that?

GREGORY. Just something I read once. Called "War."

NEIL. "We march and march and die and die . . ." Silly business, isn't it?

GREGORY. Very. Silly, and futile. Your life—mine—and a million more paid—for what? Just to create new hates, new fears, new wars, a sort of endless chain of misery—and death.

NEIL. It does seem there ought to be some other way.

GREGORY. Yes.

NEIL. Those things we talked about, lying out on the moor—what we wanted to do—what we wanted to be. I suppose all the other chaps had dreams, too, just like ours.

GREGORY. Yes.

NEIL. Am I a coward, Greg, because I don't want—to die?  
GREGORY. No.

NEIL. Wouldn't it have been better if we could have lived—all of us—made our dreams come true?

GREGORY. Yes. But—we were born into a doomed generation, Neil. When this is over, the only epitaph they can write for us is, "We wonder what they might have been."

NEIL. They seem so empty now, those words they used about all this. Duty—patriotism—sacrifice—bravery—glory . . .

GREGORY. Glory! To die here, to be picked clean by Arabs and vultures, to be buried under drifting sand, and forgotten. And for the others back there—to die, to be trampled into stinking mud—blood and flesh and bone—ground into dust to make a road for the marching feet of new armies. That's all glory amounts to. And bravery's just a cold, sick fear inside you—that turns you into something worse than a beast.

NEIL. Then—why?

GREGORY. I wish I knew, Neil. I don't understand why. I thought I did—but tonight all the old shibboleths have crumpled into dust. My mind's too tired to lie. The world's gone mad, like Moffatt out there—nothing left but a desire to kill. And they've killed a lot more than men in this war. They've killed our faith, our ideals. We've nothing left to believe in—not even—God.

NEIL. You—you mean you don't . . .

GREGORY. No. Not any more. There isn't any God, Neil.

NEIL. He does seem—awfully far away. Greg!

GREGORY. What?

NEIL. The night—it's grown so still—but not like it was before. Another sort of stillness. Notice it?

GREGORY. No, I don't.

NEIL. It seems to be listening. As if the night had come alive all over, and was waiting—for something.

GREGORY. Perhaps it's morning you feel.

NEIL. Perhaps. Will you stay with me, as long as you can?

GREGORY. Yes.

NEIL. There's not much time—to wait.

GREGORY. No. Not much time.

[*There is a sudden shot off right.*]

NEIL. What—what's that?

GREGORY. Don't know. [*He rises quickly, laying NEIL's head back on the folded tunic.*] I'll go see. [*He runs off into the darkness right.*]

NEIL. [*Turning his head in an effort to look after him.*]  
Greg! Greg!

[*There is no answer. He drops back as the lights fade out to blackness. The stage is dark for a few seconds. Then it is the first scene again, with the moonlight shining through the cleft between the rocks at the right of the stage. In it stand PETER and GILLIS, PETER up, GILLIS down, and both staring right.*]

PETER. There couldn't have been anything, Gillis.

GILLIS. But I saw him, sir.

PETER. Where?

GILLIS. Right down there, sir.

GREGORY. [*Coming into light from left.*] What is it? Who fired?

GILLIS. I did, sir.

GREGORY. Why?

PETER. He says he saw something out there.

GILLIS. And I did, sir. Plain as plain. I swear I did, sir.

GREGORY. And what did you see?

PETER. That's what I've been trying to find out.

GILLIS. And I told you, sir. It was someone coming up the wady, sir.

GREGORY. Let's have a look. [*He steps up and looks right.*]  
There's nothing out there.

GILLIS. I know that, sir. Now there ain't. That's the funny part. But I saw him, sir. Just like I'm seeing you. Walking right toward us, he was, sir. The moon was right behind him—made a sort of funny light all around his head—just like

the picture of a blinking saint, sir. And then, all of a sudden-like, there wasn't anything. He just disappeared. That's when I fired, sir. I was so surprised, I couldn't help it.

PETER. There couldn't have been anyone, Gillis. I'd have heard. There wasn't a sound.

GILLIS. That's another funny thing, sir. He didn't make no sound. He came soft, like he was walking on air. And his face was in shadow, and yet you could sort of half see it, sir—you could see he was smiling . . .

GREGORY. [*Comes down and crosses in front of GILLIS to left.*] You must have been dreaming, Gillis. I told you to keep your eyes open.

GILLIS. S' help me, sir, I was as wide awake as I am now, sir. And both my eyes was open, too. He was out there—and then he wasn't— Oh! [*He stiffens, staring left.*]

GREGORY. What is it?

GILLIS. [*Half-whisper.*] Behind you, sir. Look! There—in them shadows. Over toward the rocks where Mr. Neil is.

GREGORY. [*Drawing his gun.*] I see him.

PETER. Don't shoot, Greg, until we know who it is.

GREGORY. Get your gun, too, Peter. [*He raises his voice.*] Now you—over there! Come here! Come here, I say! Put up your hands and come. Quickly—hands up—that's it. [*The STRANGER comes out of the shadows left into the light. Apparently he is just another soldier, for he wears the uniform of an English officer, but there is no insignia on it. He has no gun, either. His hands are raised slightly, but nothing about him suggests that he is afraid.*] No—no closer. [*The STRANGER stops.*] Stand right there. Now, who are you? [*The STRANGER does not answer.*]

GILLIS. He ain't nobody I ever saw before.

GREGORY. Who are you?

GILLIS. He—he might be one of ours, sir. He's got a uniform something like.

GREGORY. Who are you? How did you get here? Answer me!

STRANGER. You won't need your gun. I am unarmed.

GREGORY. No—keep your hands up. Search him, Gillis.

GILLIS. Me, sir?

GREGORY. Yes. Go on.

GILLIS. But—but, sir . . .

GREGORY. Do as I say. Quick!

GILLIS. Yes, sir. [*He approaches the STRANGER reluctantly, searches him as reluctantly.*] No, sir, he ain't armed.

GREGORY. All right. Put your hands down. Now talk. How did you get here? What's your name—your company—who's with you . . .

STRANGER. I do not belong to any army. And I've come alone.

GILLIS. You mean to say there ain't no others?

STRANGER. English soldiers? No. Your army's about twenty miles from here, to the southeast.

GILLIS. Twenty miles! Might just as well be a million. And I was thinking maybe help had come.

GREGORY. How did you get in past the sentry? Who are you? What are you doing here? [*Getting no answer, his temper flares.*] Answer me, I say! Talk, or this gun goes off!

PETER. No, Greg! Don't do that!

GREGORY. I mean what I say. Either you talk, or . . .  
[*There is a sharp cry off left, a scuffle, and MOFFATT's crazy laughter rises, this time triumphantly, and he comes staggering into the light, a maniac of a man with tumbled hair and mad eyes. In his hands he holds a revolver.*]

GILLIS. Look, sir, look! Moffatt!

PETER. Moffatt!

GILLIS. He's got loose again. Look out, sir! He's got Williams' gun! He'll kill somebody, sure! Shoot, sir, shoot!

PETER. Get him in the arm, Greg! Quick!  
[*MOFFATT, laughing, levels the gun. The STRANGER has turned to look at him. Now he starts toward MOFFATT.*]

GREGORY. You, there—out of the way! I'm going to shoot.

Don't go toward him. He's mad. He'll kill you! Get out of the way and let me shoot!

STRANGER. [*Quietly.*] Wait! Moffatt!

[*The crazy laughter stops suddenly. MOFFATT stands there, motionless, staring at the STRANGER.*]

STRANGER. Put down that gun, Moffatt.

MOFFATT. [*In a half-whisper.*] The—the gun? [*He looks at it as if he saw it for the first time.*]

STRANGER. Put it down, Moffatt.

MOFFATT. Yes, sir. [*He lets it slide out of his hand and fall to the ground.*]

GILLIS. Well, I'll be blowed! He went and done it.

GREGORY. Get that gun, Gillis!

GILLIS. Yes, sir. [*He slides across and picks it up, remaining at left of stage.*]

MOFFATT. I—but what—what was I doing?

STRANGER. It's all right, Moffatt.

GREGORY. Get Williams, Gillis. Tie him again.

STRANGER. You won't need to do that. He's not mad now. I knew another like him once. Men couldn't keep him tied—he even broke chains—and then we met, he and I, in the way. Sit down if you want to, Moffatt.

MOFFATT. [*Sinking down to a rock.*] I—I can't think, sir. It's all mixed up in my head, queerish. I thought I wanted—I wanted—to kill—and kill . . .

STRANGER. It was just a bad dream you will forget.

MOFFATT. Who—who are you, sir? I—I seem to know, only I can't think straight yet—my head . . .

STRANGER. [*Touching MOFFATT's bowed head.*] Never mind. Just rest here, and forget, while I go to the other . . .

GREGORY. Stay where you are! [*The STRANGER turns.*] I know now. That uniform—no insignia. Deserter—or cashiered. That's it.

PETER. That's it. Officer's uniform, but no insignia.

GREGORY. So that's why you won't give your name. Because

you deserted, or were thrown out . . .

STRANGER. You are right, in a way. I am an outcast. But does that matter? Your brother needs me.

GREGORY. My brother! How did you know?

PETER. Wait, Greg. Are you—are you, by any chance, a doctor?

STRANGER. In a way. I have healed men. May I help?

GREGORY. No! Stay where you are!

PETER. Let him try, Greg. He can't hurt anything. He's unarmed and alone. He's been able to quiet Moffatt, and if he can help Neil . . . [*To STRANGER.*] The other's over there, under that rock.

GREGORY. No! We don't know who he is and I don't want . . .

PETER. What does it matter who he is? Let him help, if he can, even if he only uses hypnosis. Anything—so Neil won't have to suffer so.

GREGORY. Very well. Go on, then. But remember this gun. One wrong move, and I'll shoot!

[*The STRANGER turns and goes left. GREGORY follows. They pass into the shadows.*]

GILLIS. It's a rum thing, ain't it, sir? He—he don't exactly look English—more foreign-like—and yet seems to me I've seen him someplace or other.

PETER. That's my impression, Gillis. That I ought to know him.

GILLIS. His eyes, sir—they sort of make you feel queerish when they look at you, don't they?

PETER. They're strange eyes, with a sort of loneliness in them. Odd, but I've seen that same look in the eyes of refugees, in the eyes of homeless, starving children, in the eyes of wounded soldiers; perhaps it's the look of all sufferers and outcasts. Stay here and watch Moffatt, Gillis.

GILLIS. Yes, sir.

[*PETER goes out left. The lights dim to blackness, and the cen-*

ter light comes on again, where NEIL is lying on the rock shelf.]

GREGORY. [*Speaking right.*] Under that rock. But don't forget—I'm watching you.

[*The STRANGER comes into the light, followed by GREGORY and PETER.*]

NEIL. [*Turning his head.*] What was the excitement—oh! [*Seeing the STRANGER, he attempts to raise himself, only to fall back with a sharp gasp of pain.*]

GREGORY. Neil!

NEIL. It hurts—it hurts.

STRANGER. I know. You've lived with pain so bravely, but too long. [*He kneels beside NEIL.*] Give me your hand, Neil; that's it.

NEIL. Oh! [*It is a long-drawn sigh of release from pain, and he lies still, staring up at the STRANGER.*]

STRANGER. Now it's all right, isn't it?

NEIL. It—it doesn't hurt—any more.

STRANGER. And it won't hurt you any more.

GILLIS. [*Coming in right.*] You know, sir, it's a rum thing, but Moffatt's sitting there as sane now as you or me . . .

PETER. Quiet, Gillis!

GILLIS. Yes, sir—lor', sir, look! His hands! Did you see . . .

PETER. I said quiet.

GILLIS. Yes, sir.

STRANGER. Would you like a drink, Neil?

GREGORY. Don't torture him! We've no water.

STRANGER. [*To PETER.*] Would you give me that water bottle there?

GREGORY. It's empty. I tell you we've no water.

STRANGER. Please.

PETER. [*Handing it to him.*] Here you are, sir.

STRANGER. Thank you. Here, Neil, let me lift your head.

GILLIS. Oh, my good heavens, sir! Look! There's water coming out; it's running down his chin.

GREGORY. Peter—Peter, am I mad—or do you see what I . . .

PETER. Yes, I see. But—I don't understand.

GILLIS. It's water!

STRANGER. Is that enough?

NEIL. Yes. Thanks. I—I think I know—it is—you— isn't it?

STRANGER. Are you surprised? You were asking me to come.

NEIL. But—but nobody knew . . .

STRANGER. I heard, nevertheless.

GILLIS. Water!

NEIL. But—but you're different, somehow—from what I thought.

STRANGER. Usually I am different—from what people think.

NEIL. I suppose—it's no beard. I'm—so tired. You won't—go away?

STRANGER. Not until I've done all I came to do for you. Rest now. There's no more pain, no fear. Close your eyes and rest. That is it. Rest.

GREGORY. Neil!

STRANGER. He's asleep. That's all. He was worn out fighting pain, but now the pain is gone. [*He rises.*]

GILLIS. Water! Water—out of an empty bottle . . .

STRANGER. Drink, too, if you wish. And give some to the others out there. There's enough for all of you.

GILLIS. [*Takes bottle gingerly, tips it.*] Water—it's real water! It even wet my finger! Look!

PETER. Go on, Gillis. Do as he says. Pass it about.

GILLIS. Yes, sir. Yes, sir. I'm blowed! Real water—out of an empty bottle—just like a blooming miracle. [*He goes into shadows at right.*]

GREGORY. What trick was that? Who are you? Answer me! Who are you?

STRANGER. You don't know? And yet—you asked me for help.

GREGORY. I what? You're mad; I never . . . Who are you?

STRANGER. Will you call your men together now?

GREGORY. Why?

STRANGER. So that I can take you to your army—to safety.

GREGORY. You're mad! You said yourself the army's twenty miles off. And if we walk out beyond those rocks there, we'll be cut down by fire from both sides. And if we aren't, it's one hour to moonset—then daylight. How far can we get in an hour? We'd just be caught out there in the open, and finished.

PETER. The result will be the same here, Greg. What does it matter where it ends? He got here somehow. He might be able to get us back. And if there's one chance in a thousand . . .

GREGORY. But here we can fight with some advantage, make it cost them something before they finish us.

STRANGER. You would rather remain here and die—for the pleasure of killing a few men before you do? Are their deaths worth yours?

GREGORY. You can't save us! I tell you the minute we step into the open, we'll be shot.

STRANGER. Nothing can hurt you as long as you're with me.

GREGORY. You expect me to believe that?

STRANGER. I ask you to trust me.

GREGORY. Trust you, knowing what you are? Renegade—deserter—spy!

PETER. Greg!

GREGORY. That's what he is! He must have been out there with the Arabs. That's the only way he could have gotten in here.

PETER. I still think we can trust him, Greg. And after all, what does it matter?

GREGORY. No. No, I suppose it doesn't matter whether we die here, or out there. The quicker it ends, the better. All right. Go on; lead us out there to death!

PETER. Greg! Don't . . .

GREGORY. That's what you were sent in here to do, isn't it? To do a few cheap tricks, win our confidence, and lead us out into the open for your Arab friends to shoot! Very well. We'll follow you, but when we die I swear you'll die, too! You'll

never live to laugh about this! We'll die, but we'll all die together!

PETER. Greg! Hang on to yourself! I'm sorry, sir—it's no sleep for two nights—all the weight of this. He didn't mean . . .

STRANGER. I know. You are so tired. Look at me.

GREGORY. I . . . [*His eyes meet those of the STRANGER. There is a moment of silence; then he draws a deep breath.*] Sorry. Didn't mean to blow up like that. Shouldn't have.

STRANGER. I understand.

[GILLIS enters right, with the water bottle.]

GILLIS. There's still quite a bit of the water left, sir. I never did know these blooming bottles held so much. Everybody's had plenty, too. Would you like the rest, sir?

PETER. Thanks, Gillis. Here, Greg.

GREGORY. No, I really don't want . . .

PETER. Yes, you do. Stop being noble, and take it.

GREGORY. Thanks. [*Takes bottle; drinks.*] The rest for you, Peter. Did I leave enough?

PETER. Yes. [*Drinks.*] Like Gillis, the capacity of this bottle amazes me. You, sir?

STRANGER. No, thank you. Shall we call your men now? [*Then, as GREGORY hesitates.*] You needn't fear any treachery. I'll take you to safety. I promise.

GREGORY. [*Wearily.*] All right. As you please. We'll take the chance. [*He and the STRANGER go off right.*]

GILLIS. Where're we going, sir?

PETER. To join our army, I hope.

GILLIS. He—he's taking us? You—you think he can get us through to them, sir?

PETER. Yes, I think he can.

GILLIS. Funny about him. He looks like he ought to be a General—or a Captain, maybe. Generals ain't usually so young. He walks so straight. Suppose he really was a soldier, once?

PETER. I—don't know. Moffatt all right?

GILLIS. Yes, sir. He's still sort of dazed-like, but he's all right. I wish I could remember where I seen—him before. And did you notice, sir, the funny scars on his hands? I saw 'em when he was helping Mr. Neil.

PETER. Yes. I noticed.

GILLIS. Palm to back they was on both hands—like something had gone right through.

PETER. Perhaps something did—once.

GILLIS. Poor bloke! Do you suppose—it's kind of awful to think about—but I've heard tell how sometimes these Turks, when they get a prisoner . . .

PETER. No, Gillis. Those scars—are very old, I think.

GILLIS. You got any idea who he is?

PETER. It's utterly incredible—utterly unbelievable—but yes, I think I know.

GILLIS. Who, sir?

PETER. Tell you later, Gillis. But you won't believe me then, either. Nobody will. Not even we ourselves—tomorrow. When the sun shines, we'll call it all a mad dream—something that never happened.

GILLIS. I don't understand, sir.

PETER. No. You don't. Neither do I.

[GREGORY and the STRANGER re-enter right.]

GREGORY. Fall in with the men, Gillis. Tell them to keep in behind us, and go quietly. No order necessary, but stay close together. Be ready for anything.

GILLIS. Yes, sir. [*Exits right.*]

PETER. Shall I carry Neil?

STRANGER. No. I will.

PETER. He's a heavy youngster.

STRANGER. I'm very strong. I can carry him easily. [*He picks NEIL up, and PETER takes NEIL's tunic.*]

GREGORY. [*His gun in his hand.*] We'll go first, Peter. And in a minute, when we get out beyond the rocks, we'll know

whether we die or not.

[*He and PETER exit right. The STRANGER follows, with NEIL. For a few seconds the stage remains empty. There is no sound. Then light dims out to blackness.*

*The next scene is the top of a low hill, or rise, black against the sky. The moon is setting behind and below the hill. PETER and GREGORY, both carrying their guns in their hands, enter left. The moonlight behind them throws their figures into silhouette against the sky. On top of the rise they stop and look back.]*

PETER. We'd better wait, Greg. We're a bit ahead of the others. Tired?

GREGORY. No. It's nearly an hour, isn't it?

PETER. Yes. I've been watching the moon. It'll set in a few minutes. Wonder how far we've come?

GREGORY. Hard to tell. All this country looks alike in the moonlight.

PETER. Queer, though, but I've an impression of a long, long distance passed. Odd, too, that there hasn't been a sign of an Arab, and last night I'd have sworn there were ten thousand surrounding us.

GREGORY. They were gone, and he knew it. That's why he was so certain about getting us out.

PETER. I wonder—if they were gone. Didn't you notice, Greg, that until we started up this hill, we walked in a strange sort of shadow? It's gone now.

[*The STRANGER enters left, carrying NEIL. Goes right and lays NEIL on the ground gently.*]

STRANGER. We'll wait here for the rest of your men to come.

PETER. Neil still asleep?

STRANGER. Yes.

PETER. What—what of his leg, sir?

STRANGER. He will limp a little, that is all. Just enough to remind him always that war is a fool's game, that all the players lose.

GREGORY. Thank heaven, this war's over for him.

STRANGER. For him, yes. Now he may go home to England, and wait. And one day you and he will ride over the moors again, and swim in the black pool where the birches grow.

GREGORY. How—how did you know?

STRANGER. And Gillis will see his bit of a girl again.

GREGORY. How did you know, I say? Who—who are you?

STRANGER. You still do not know? Call me then an outcast—from the hearts of men. [*He walks to the crest of the hill.*] This is as far as I go with you. You do not need me any more.

GREGORY. But . . .

GILLIS. [*Enters left.*] I say, sir, look down there! Soldiers! [*Points right.*]

GREGORY. Soldiers! Yes! Get the men up here, Gillis! Quick!

STRANGER. Those are English soldiers. Your army. You're behind your own lines.

GREGORY. Behind our lines! But—but we can't be. It was twenty miles—we've had only an hour—the moon's just touching the horizon.

STRANGER. You're behind your own lines. I've brought you to safety—as I promised.

GILLIS. Maybe he's right, sir. That little hill over there looks like the one we was camped by four days ago.

GREGORY. Get the men, Gillis. We'll see.

GILLIS. They're waiting down there, sir.

[GREGORY and GILLIS exit right, leaving PETER and the STRANGER standing on the hill. NEIL sits up, yawning.]

PETER. Twenty miles! We walked twenty miles—in one hour!

NEIL. I must have slept—oh! You—you're still here?

STRANGER. Yes.

NEIL. I—I thought it was a dream, but I'm glad it wasn't. I say, where are we? And where's Greg?

PETER. Gone down the hill there. We're back behind our own lines, Neil—and safe.

STRANGER. I've kept my promise to you, Neil.

NEIL. I—I knew you would, sir. Thank you.

PETER. I—I'd like to say thank you, too. This is such a strange, beautiful thing I hardly know what to say, or do. But—do you mind if I ask—why did you come to us, like this?

STRANGER. To show you there is still something in which you can believe. Something unchanging, eternal, something that all the hate in the world can't kill.

PETER. I see.

NEIL. I say, sir, can't you—can't you stop all this?

STRANGER. No. I can't stop it. Men must do that themselves. Long ago I told them the way, the way to peace; but until men listen, and learn, and follow that way of their own will . . .

PETER. Then this war—won't end war, as they say?

STRANGER. No.

PETER. And so all we've done—amounts to nothing?

STRANGER. Yes. This war will end, but there will be no peace when it's done. Only more war. And so it will be as long as men drown my voice beneath the clash of weapons—the thunder of guns—the tramp of marching feet—the screams of the dying—the wailing of those that mourn the dead; beneath the clink of gold that pays for the things that destroy; beneath the voices of those who cry war and havoc and hatred—the ravings of madmen who would possess the earth—and care not what it costs in human life, nor that each foot they conquer is drenched in blood—if all these would grow still—if only for a little while there could be a silence over the earth—then men might hear. But through all the centuries—there has never been that silence.

PETER. Some have heard.

STRANGER. Yes. But too few.

PETER. Perhaps—someday, sir . . .

STRANGER. Perhaps—someday. But it has been so long since men were shown the way to lasting peace, yet never in all the

centuries have they listened, or tried that way.

PETER. They call it impractical.

STRANGER. I know. They are still crucifying truth, and mocking on Calvary.

PETER. Is there—is there anything we can do, sir?

STRANGER. Speak the truth to men. If there are enough voices speaking the truth, the sound may rise above the thunder of the guns, above all the sound of war, so that those who mock and deny must listen. Tell them that there is only one way to peace among nations.

PETER. I'll do what I can, sir.

NEIL. [*Who has risen to his feet.*] And I, sir. Because—it's up to us.

STRANGER. Thank you. [*He turns and goes down the hill and out of sight.*]

GREGORY. [*Enters right, followed by GILLIS.*] Peter! Peter, we are behind our own lines. We've come twenty miles!

GILLIS. We went and got back someway . . . Look, sir! Mr. Neill

GREGORY. Neil! You—you're standing!

NEIL. Of course. I'm all right, Greg. What's the matter? Didn't you know I would be—after he came?

PETER. There are still miracles left in the world, Gregory.

GREGORY. I—where—where is he?

GILLIS. There he goes, sir, walking off by himself just like he came. And—and see, sir? That's how I first saw him—with the moon making a light all around him.

PETER. I see.

GILLIS. If this ain't the queerest!

GREGORY. Peter—Peter, he—he couldn't have been . . .

PETER. Why not?

GREGORY. Oh!

NEIL. Now do you understand, Greg?

PETER. He came to show us there was still something in which we could believe.

GREGORY. And I—I didn't know . . .

*[As they stand there, staring down the hill, the light begins to dim.]*

GILLIS. Why—he's gone! He just went—him and the moon together.

PETER. Yes. He and the moon together.

GILLIS. I wish I could remember where I seen him before.

PETER. Perhaps—someday—you will. But you still won't believe it, Gillis. You still won't believe it.

*[The light fades out to blackness.]*

CURTAIN



# THE CAVE

By

Y. GALITZKY

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# THE CAVE

## CHARACTERS

SOLOMON LEVI, *Surgeon*

BRAUNKRAFT, *Colonel*

KRAUSE, *Storm Trooper*

TIME: The present.

SCENE: Somewhere in Germany.

## THE CAVE

LEVI. Is this the way?

KRAUSE. Yes, this is the room, Herr Doctor.

LEVI. Strange . . . I expected a grimmer reception than this. . . . Cheerful room, upholstered furniture. . . . May I sit down?

KRAUSE. That is your right, Herr Doctor.

LEVI. [*Seated.*] I can scarcely believe my eyes. . . . What do you think, Herr Krause? What would you have said in those days—do you remember—if somebody had told you that we would be meeting here in this place?

KRAUSE. Yes, it would have been hard to believe. . . . But please don't call me "Herr Krause." I am just plain "Krause" to you. . . . If it hadn't been for you I would have remained a cripple all my life.

LEVI. Yes, that was a fierce leg fracture of yours, Krause, and it gave me more pleasure to set it right than if I had won 200,000 marks. Even I, Solomon Levi the surgeon, thought you would remain a cripple for the rest of your life. . . . When you left my hospital without crutches, not even leaning on a stick, I said to myself: "Solomon Levi, you really are a good surgeon!" Eh? What do you think, Krause, had I the right to pay myself that compliment?

KRAUSE. Absolutely, Herr Doctor.

LEVI. Yes, at that time I had not only that right; I had the right to . . . Say, Krause, can it have really been? You said some very nice things to me then. . . . You even tried, if I remember rightly, to kiss my hand—and not any hand, but the one that held the surgeon's knife.

KRAUSE. After that I lost sight of you.

LEVI. No, not altogether. We met once again. You were a

policeman, one of the detachment that wrecked my hospital. . . . You were wearing a swastika on your breast. True, you were very circumspect when they led me away under arrest; you pretended you did not recognize me.

KRAUSE. That couldn't be helped, Herr Doctor. It was all in the day's work. Duty and all that. . . .

LEVI. So it was from duty, was it? I thought it was from conviction. . . .

KRAUSE. Naturally, from conviction as well. You must have convictions, Herr Doctor. If you don't, you may find yourself without a crust of bread.

LEVI. So that's it. . . . Well, I suppose it's no use quarreling with that sort of conviction. It comes from very deep down.

KRAUSE. From the heart, Herr Doctor?

LEVI. Deeper than that, Krause—from the stomach.

KRAUSE. I see you love your joke as much as ever, Herr Doctor.

LEVI. Just as much as ever, Krause. . . . Don't think that it's only life that likes to laugh. It would be a dull world without laughter. By the way, talking about life—have you any idea why I have been called here?

KRAUSE. I have not been informed, Herr Doctor.

LEVI. To tell the truth, I am rather worried about it. As far as I know, for the last three years the Gestapo has never summoned a Jew simply in order to inquire how he is getting on. What do you say, Krause?

KRAUSE. It's not my business to reason about such matters, Herr Doctor.

LEVI. Yes, I forgot, you are a man of convictions. . . . But all the same, why have I been called here? What have I done? I never leave the ghetto without a permit. I am wearing my yellow band with the word "Jew" on it. Here it is, neatly fastened onto the sleeve of my coat, as you see. My daughter sewed it on.

KRAUSE. Your daughter used to be a very pretty little girl.

LEVI. And she is a very fine young woman now. Now, what can I be guilty of? Ever since Jewish doctors were forbidden to treat Aryans, I have not felt a single Aryan pulse or desecrated a single Aryan appendix. . . . What is my crime, I wonder?

KRAUSE. Is it worth worrying your head over, Herr Doctor? Just wait a minute and Herr Braunkraft will explain everything himself.

LEVI. Who? Braunkraft?

KRAUSE. Now there, just as I thought. For some reason or other every non-Aryan turns pale when he hears Herr Braunkraft's name.

LEVI. For some reason or other! It seems you like your little joke, too. Krause . . . I wonder what's in store for me. Interrogations? Fresh humiliations? New tor . . .

KRAUSE. Now then, Herr Doctor, please don't forget I am here in the way of duty. I was ordered to treat you politely. But orders may be changed, you know. . . . [*Telephone rings. KRAUSE takes up the receiver.*] This is Police-Sergeant Krause. . . . Your orders have been carried out, Herr Colonel. The Jewish doctor is here in your office, Herr Colonel. Very well, Herr Colonel. . . . [*Puts down the receiver, comes smartly to attention, and then steps aside.*] Take a drink of water and calm down. Now then. [*LEVI drops into an armchair.*] That's better.

[*COLONEL BRAUNKRAFT appears in the doorway. He has a close-clipped mustache, his tunic is tightly drawn in at the waist, and he speaks with an affected air of pleasure. LEVI rises; KRAUSE salutes.*]

BRAUNKRAFT. [*In the doorway.*] The ancients used to say that the mere presence of a man of learning turns a cave into a palace. I feel as if I am in a palace, Herr Doctor. I am glad to see you. Won't you sit down?

LEVI. Thank you.

BRAUNKRAFT. So you are Doctor Levi, the surgeon, the man they call the king of the operating table.

LEVI. They used to call me that. They don't any more. It is three years since I attended my last operation, not counting the fracture of my own leg. . . . It was that time, you know, in Munich . . .

BRAUNKRAFT. Is it worth while recalling bygones, Doctor?

LEVI. Oh, I would like all bygones to be deleted from my memory forever, but . . .

BRAUNKRAFT. Let us drop that, Herr Doctor. Accidents are accidents, and men of learning are men of learning.

LEVI. Even if the man of learning is a Jew . . . I mean to say not a full-blooded Aryan?

BRAUNKRAFT. There you are harping on that one string. As if there were nothing else to talk about. Now, this is what I wanted to talk to you about, Herr Doctor. . . . Do you smoke? [*Hands him a box of cigars.*]

LEVI. Thank you. [*Lights up.*]

BRAUNKRAFT. [*To KRAUSE.*] I will call you when I want you. . . . [*Exit KRAUSE.*] How long were you in charge of your hospital?

LEVI. Fourteen years and seven months, Herr Colonel.

BRAUNKRAFT. They used to say your hospital performed miracles. Isn't that so?

LEVI. Miracles don't happen. However, not to be too modest, I may say that the Imperial Hospital used to regard me as a dangerous rival.

BRAUNKRAFT. Yes, we know that, Doctor. You used to have a wonderful hospital—bright, cheerful wards, splendid order, marvelous equipment.

LEVI. My heart and soul were in my work, Herr Colonel.

BRAUNKRAFT. It earned you your bread and butter?

LEVI. More than that, it gave me happiness.

BRAUNKRAFT. A splendid reply! Now, listen to me, Doctor. . . . What would you say if tomorrow you were to don your surgeon's smock and perform five or six operations? . . . Why, what's the matter with you? Are you ill?

LEVI. [*Rising.*] That is not kind of you, Herr Colonel. It is wrong to scoff at a helpless man. . . . Don't I know I am a Jew?

BRAUNKRAFT. Pshaw! What feeble nerves you have! Pull yourself together, Doctor! A surgeon should have the heart of a lion. . . . I am quite serious. What would you say if I were to invite you to take charge of the surgical hospital? . . . Why are you silent?

LEVI. Pardon me . . . I could not have heard you aright. . . . You are inviting me . . . a Jew?

BRAUNKRAFT. Omit that detail; it has nothing to do with the case.

LEVI. No, it cannot be overlooked. I know that only the other day a certain Jew, a former lawyer, was sentenced to death for having touched the jacket of a German. . . . Why this difference between yesterday and today?

BRAUNKRAFT. It is not a difference of days, but of people. The lawyer, a criminal, is one thing; Levi, the surgeon, is another.

LEVI. Pardon me, but I want to warn you against making a mistake. The parents of the surgeon sitting before you, like those of the lawyer who has been shot, lie buried, not in a Lutheran cemetery, not even in a Catholic cemetery, but in a Jewish one. . . . Does not the burial ceremony of the parents make the sons akin in your eyes? Yesterday I would not have dared to drag a splinter out of a German's finger, yet today . . . No, there is something wrong here. . . . I am afraid that your ideologists would accuse you of making a very serious blunder. . . .

BRAUNKRAFT. Bravo, Herr Doctor! You have absorbed the race theory more thoroughly than even the most orthodox Nazi.

LEVI. Don't laugh at that, colonel! We learned your ideology not in theory, but in practice, by our own experience, and at our own cost. . . . Believe me, neither in England nor America have people pondered so much over Herr Professor Rosenberg's

theories as we Jews who have been flung into the ghetto. . . . Don't be surprised, therefore, if we are so familiar with the race theory.

BRAUNKRAFT. But to be familiar with it is one thing; to defend it is another. You are defending Professor Rosenberg too ardently.

LEVI. Oh, no, Herr Colonel, I am not defending him. I am defending myself. . . . I am afraid of everything nowadays, especially of what I don't understand. . . . The incomprehensible terrifies me.

BRAUNKRAFT. Is my offer, then, so incomprehensible?

LEVI. Yes. I cannot understand what higher power could lead you to offer citizenship to a Jewish surgeon . . . I repeat: citizenship. For to offer a man the right to be of benefit to others is to offer him all rights.

BRAUNKRAFT. You are an incorrigible idealist, Doctor. . . . Citizenship! Rights! . . . Rights can always be counterbalanced by duties, not citizenship. . . . But that is not the point. . . . It is all much simpler than you imagine and can be boiled down to three elementary propositions: first proposition: Germany, as you know, is at war with the Bolsheviks. We are fighting for a new order, for a happier future for mankind, for supreme justice, for . . . [*Frowns.*] Do I observe you smile?

LEVI. [*Startled.*] No, no! . . . Would I dare? . . .

BRAUNKRAFT. Yes, smiling would be out of place. Let me continue. Second proposition: the war with the Soviet Army, as our command foresaw from the beginning, has become a protracted one. It is no secret to you, of course, that we have lots of wounded. Far too many. They must be restored to health at all costs and sent back to the front. . . . From which the third proposition follows naturally: a hospital without physicians is not a hospital, but a morgue. . . . How could we foresee that we would have a shortage of physicians? We need physicians, Doctor. Please bear in mind that I am talking to you as frankly as I would at any one of our confidential meetings. . . .

LEVI. [*Slowly.*] So you need physicians? [BRAUNKRAFT *nods his head affirmatively.*] Even if they are non-Aryans?

BRAUNKRAFT. Even if they are non-Aryans. . . . As you see, Doctor, it is all quite plain and simple, without any mysticism, and without the interference of any supermundane forces. . . . [*Rises.*] You will enter on your duties tomorrow. The form for your appointment has already been made out; all that is required is one small detail, your signature.

LEVI. Then it is not so much an offer as a command?

BRAUNKRAFT. How you do love exact formulations, Doctor. Request or command—is it not all one?

LEVI. By no means. Not to obey a human command is much easier than not to hearken to a human request.

BRAUNKRAFT. Well, take it that we are requesting you. Nay, more, imploring you, doctor. . . . I repeat, we need you. We need your head with its faculty for rapid diagnosis; we need your skillful hands; and lastly, we need your administrative ability.

LEVI. You want me to start a new hospital?

BRAUNKRAFT. No, no. The address of your hospital is No. 17, Sonnenstrasse.

LEVI. What? No. 17, Sonnenstrasse!

BRAUNKRAFT. You are familiar with that address, I see.

LEVI. My hospital? . . . My former hospital, I meant to say . . .

BRAUNKRAFT. Surely it will be pleasant for you to be sitting at your own desk again, in your own office. . . .

LEVI. My office. . . . Two busts . . . Hippocrates and Spinoza. . . . The portraits of Pasteur, Virchow, Pavlov. . . . The library of seven thousand volumes—the condensed genius of the finest minds of humanity. . . .

BRAUNKRAFT. And about forty volumes of your own works—two whole shelves, Doctor.

LEVI. On the right, the door leading to the electrical treatment department and X-ray departments. . . . On the left, the small

door. . . . Through it I used to go—as though to a rendezvous—to the operating room. . . . My operating room. . . . My scalpel. . . . My mask. . . . My operating table. . . . Ach, Colonel, Colonel, if you only knew what memories you have awakened!

BRAUNKRAFT. I could also remind you of something else. The spiral staircase. Your day's work is over, and you mount it to your dining room. There at the table sits your wife. [LEVI *shudders*.] Pardon me, I forgot. You lost her recently, didn't you? . . . Never mind, your daughter will take her place. . . .

LEVI. So I may also transfer my family from the ghetto to Sonnenstrasse?

BRAUNKRAFT. Naturally.

LEVI. And I may stop wearing this armlet?

BRAUNKRAFT. You will wear military uniform, and not the uniform of a cheap lieutenant either. . . . You realize that only people of the highest influence will be operated on at your hospital on the Sonnenstrasse; our military leaders, our finest airmen, the most prominent propagandists of our ideology—our whole central nervous system, if I may call it so. You and your colleagues will be privileged individuals.

LEVI. In other words, I shall be a free man?

BRAUNKRAFT. Yes, relatively speaking.

LEVI. Very good. And what about the others? [BRAUNKRAFT *looks perplexed*.] I am referring to the lawyers, the engineers, artisans, thinkers, and manual laborers from whom I took leave a couple of hours ago in the ghetto. . . . They pressed my hand sadly as they bade me farewell. . . . You see, they did not know what was awaiting me.

BRAUNKRAFT. Pardon me, Doctor, but I don't understand what bearing these people can have on our conversation.

LEVI. But, don't you see, from the point of view of race I am no different from them in any way. . . .

BRAUNKRAFT. Harping on the old string again, Doctor? You are pondering and hesitating as if somebody were asking a feat

of heroism of you, when, as a matter of fact, all you have to do is dip the pen in the ink and sign your name on this form.

LEVI. Yes, you are right, signing one's name is not a hard thing to do.

BRAUNKRAFT. Then, why don't you? Here is the pen.

LEVI. [*With a sad smile.*] You know, Herr Colonel, a Jew always likes to think a matter over, to weigh it up carefully, and to consult his wife. True, he often listens to his wife's advice only to go and do the very opposite.

BRAUNKRAFT. But you haven't got a wife.

LEVI. Then let me consult with myself. And however I decide, so it will be.

BRAUNKRAFT. I hope the "consultation" will not take very long?

LEVI. Oh, no, only two or three minutes, not more. Have I your permission?

BRAUNKRAFT. Well, there is nothing for it, I suppose. . . .

[*LEVI goes into a corner, sinks into a deep armchair and is lost in reflection. BRAUNKRAFT rings. Enter KRAUSE.*]

KRAUSE. Did you ring, Herr Colonel?

BRAUNKRAFT. Is there anybody in the waiting-room?

KRAUSE. Nobody, sir.

BRAUNKRAFT. I will not receive anybody else today. Wait until I call for you.

KRAUSE. Very well, sir. [*Exit KRAUSE.*]

BRAUNKRAFT. Well, what do you say, Doctor?

LEVI. Everything is now clear to me, I think.

BRAUNKRAFT. That's fine.

LEVI. I would only like to ask two purely practical questions.

BRAUNKRAFT. Please.

LEVI. Naturally, in my work I shall often have occasion to resort to blood transfusion. . . . All healthy Germans, as you know, are at the front. . . . Here at home there is a shortage of donors. Yet blood will be needed. . . . What do you think,

Herr Colonel, may I, in case of need, use the blood of prisoners of war—Czechs, Poles or Serbs? . . .

BRAUNKRAFT. Why, of course. It is the result that is important. A storm-trooper must be rendered fit to return to the front and fight for us.

LEVI. So, in case of necessity, one may shut one's eyes to the principle of the purity of German blood. . . .

BRAUNKRAFT. [*Slowly.*] You are not smiling now either, I hope?

LEVI. Yes, this time I really am smiling. I cannot help picturing what a long face Herr Professor Rosenberg would pull if he were to hear what you are saying.

BRAUNKRAFT. There you go again with your Rosenberg!

LEVI. Not my Rosenberg, but yours, Herr Colonel. . . . And how can I help smiling? Seven years of endless talk about the purity of the German blood and about the valuelessness of Jewish science, and in a couple of months it is all forgotten because of certain unforeseen circumstances in the future of war which the High Command duly "foresaw." Pardon me, but there really is something to smile at.

BRAUNKRAFT. [*Through his teeth.*] It seems you are beginning to forget who is the master here.

LEVI. On the contrary, I am beginning to realize that at the present moment I am the master of the situation. You have far too many wounded, Herr Colonel. A wounded general is worth less than a healthy corporal—and I am the best surgeon in Germany, no matter what blood flows in my veins. You need me more than I need you.

BRAUNKRAFT. [*Threateningly.*] Now, listen here . . .

LEVI. One moment, please; you allowed me one more question.

BRAUNKRAFT. Don't you think our conversation has lasted too long already, Herr Jew?

LEVI. I will not detain you long. [*Puffs at his cigar.*] My last question is as follows: how is it that you, an intelligent and experienced man, could believe even for one minute that I would

consent to your proposal?

BRAUNKRAFT. What, what's that? This is becoming interesting.

LEVI. Like the end of every plot. My name is Solomon Levi. I am a surgeon, known to the scientific world in every part of the globe. For two years I have been confined to the ghetto. My wife—her name was Augusta—was a devoted mother and a splendid wife. She died in the ghetto. My son contracted tuberculosis in the ghetto. My daughter . . . I think with horror what would happen to her if one of your husky storm-troopers were to clap eyes on her. . . . But now everything is changing: I am being restored to my home and to my hospital. I am "relatively" free. But for how long?

BRAUNKRAFT. That will depend on your services.

LEVI. No, that is not true . . . under your regime my services will be my undoing. You will pet me and fondle me as long as your army sheds blood heavily. If I and my fellow-Jews, by their knowledge and skill, should fill the ranks of your armies with healthy German flesh; if your storm-troopers, their veins swollen with alien blood, should be victorious, what would happen to the millions of sons and daughters of the Levis, the Jewish surgeons, before whom you are now politely bowing and scraping, Herr Colonel?

BRAUNKRAFT. [*Losing control of himself.*] You Jewish scum! [*Bangs on the table with his fist.*]

LEVI. Now you have stopped bowing and scraping. . . . That is just the way you will talk to me if, which heaven forbid, your army ceases to have any need for Jewish physicians. . . . And that may come about only as a result of a very complex combination of circumstances, Herr Colonel. . . . For that it would be necessary for the star of the Soviet Army to fade; for the old British lion to grow weak and impotent; for the American Stars and Stripes to become a rug for the German storm-troop leaders to wipe their feet on; for the letter "V" to disappear from the French alphabet; for the words "Yugoslavian," "Belgian," "Nor-

wegian" and many another fine word to become the dead names of extinct nationalities. . . . You see how many circumstances range themselves on your side for you to have less wounded than physicians. . . . However, I see . . . You don't mind my going on? How magnanimous! Why, what I am saying to you today, I may be saying to my new patients tomorrow. . . .

BRAUNKRAFT. [*Calmly.*] Never mind, go on. Tomorrow you will not be in a position to say anything. A man sentenced to death is usually allowed to have his last word.

LEVI. [*Shudders.*] Sentenced to death! [*Masters himself.*] Yes . . . of course. I had foreseen that diagnosis.

BRAUNKRAFT. Well, go ahead. Have your last say.

LEVI. According to the law I have the right to speak in the presence of witnesses.

BRAUNKRAFT. That is true. [*Calls.*] Krause! [*Enter KRAUSE.*] Stand here! [*To LEVI.*] Here is your witness.

LEVI. Thank you. Krause will understand me better than anyone else.

BRAUNKRAFT. Krause, does this Jew know you?

LEVI. This Jew has done for Krause that which you would have him do for all your army. Krause was a cripple, but now . . .

BRAUNKRAFT. Krause, this Jew talks too much. You know how to teach people to be polite.

[*KRAUSE calmly goes up to LEVI and in a business-like fashion strikes him over the head with a rubber truncheon. LEVI staggers and grasps the back of a chair. A long pause.*]

LEVI. That is just what I said: that is the way every Nazi, when he recovers his health, will thank the Jew who saved him. . . . What is that you said, Herr Colonel—the mere presence of a man of learning turns caves into palaces? I pity you; your palaces are doomed to be caves forever—no men of learning will enter them. [*Almost shrieks.*] No, that will never be! Knowledge is life, it is the highest happiness, it means universal equality. . . . But you—you are death for the sake of death, hatred for

the sake of hatred . . . and [*Raises his hand.*] let this hand be accursed if it returns to life even a single soldier of your army—the army of universal destruction!

BRAUNKRAFT. Krause, it's time to put an end to this comedy, don't you think?

KRAUSE. As you say, Herr Colonel. Shall I get rid of him?

BRAUNKRAFT. Yes.

LEVI. And what about the forty volumes of my works? How are you going to get rid of them, I ask? They are to be found in the libraries of the whole world. You will not destroy them so easily, Herr Nazi!

BRAUNKRAFT. [*In a fury.*] Take him away!

[KRAUSE leads LEVI by the arm into an adjoining room.]

LEVI. [*As he is led off.*] You will not destroy them! Human thought cannot be destroyed!

[*A pause. KRAUSE returns.*]

BRAUNKRAFT. Is it all over?

KRAUSE. Yes, Herr Colonel. . . . [*A pause.*] But he was a fine surgeon, that Jew.

BRAUNKRAFT. That is no consolation; we are badly in need of surgeons.

CURTAIN



# CEILING

By

DORIS HALMAN

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## CEILING

### CHARACTERS

JOHN, *the grocer*

MARTHA, *his wife*

FREDDY, *their son*

BETTY, *their daughter*

BILL TRUMAN, *the grocer's helper*

MRS. BIRCH, *a lady customer*

TIME: May 17, 1942.

SETTING: A desk at night—a grocery store.

## CEILING

AT RISE: *The stage is in darkness except for a shaded desk lamp which throws its pool of light on the flat surface of the desk and on the man who is sitting behind it, working. He is about fifty, with a normally good-natured face which now is creased and drawn in lines of weariness. He is in his shirt sleeves, and wears an apron. On the desk are account books from which, slowly and painstakingly, with pencil and paper, he is compiling a long list. An invisible clock is striking the hour of nine.*

THE GROCER. [Mumbling to himself.] Tomato soup—ten cents a can. . . . Tomatoes, canned—eighteen. . . . Corn—per can,—eleven. . . .

[*In the narrow circle of light there now appears a yawning youngster, twelve years old. He has a book in his hand.*]

THE GROCER'S SON. Dad. . . . Hey,—Dad!

THE GROCER. [Looking up with difficulty.] Eh? Oh, it's you, Freddy,—run away and play!

THE GROCER'S SON. I can't. Mom says I've got to go to bed now—it's nine o'clock!

THE GROCER. [Abstractedly.] Is it? Well, all right, then, go to bed—good night, son.

THE GROCER'S SON. No! My arithmetic for tomorrow—you said you'd help me!

THE GROCER. Not now . . . I've got all the arithmetic I can do right here!

THE GROCER'S SON. But, Dad, you promised you'd help me! It'll only take you a minute; you're a grocer and it's a *grocery store* problem!

THE GROCER. Yes? Well, the government's given me a bigger

grocery store problem than your teachers ever thought of! I can't stop now, Freddy, maybe in the morning. . . .

THE GROCER'S SON. Aw, no—then it'll be late—and everybody'll be hurrying. *Please, Dad!*

THE GROCER. Listen, son—I wish I could,—but I brought these account books home from the store two nights ago to work on and I've worked on 'em ever since, and I'm not through yet—and I can't stop. The government says I can't!

THE GROCER'S SON. Why does it?

THE GROCER. Because I've got to put up a list of these prices by tomorrow, where everyone in town can see 'em! And change all my prices to match!

THE GROCER'S SON. Why?

THE GROCER. Because of the ceiling! [THE GROCER'S SON *looks up.*] No, no, no, not the ceiling in this room; it's a law, a new law, about the price of food! I have to charge the same price on most every kind of food, that I charged last March,—that's the top the law'll allow me to get from now on—that's the ceiling!

THE GROCER'S SON. Why?

THE GROCER. I don't know why—to make things harder for us, I guess!

THE GROCER'S SON. If it's going to make things harder for us, Dad, don't do it!

THE GROCER. I've got to; it's the law, and all my life I've been law-abiding, and I'm going to stay that way, whether I see the right or wrong of it— [*Sighs.*] till I go out of business!

THE GROCER'S SON. Gosh—are you going out of business?

THE GROCER. Not if I can help it—but this'll probably force me out. . . . Now, Freddy, will you please go away, and . . . [*Into the light comes a sweet-faced woman in her late forties.*]

THE GROCER'S WIFE. Freddy!

THE GROCER'S SON. [*Guiltily.*] Aw, well, look, Mom. . . .

THE GROCER'S WIFE. I thought you'd be bothering your

father, if I took my eyes off you!

THE GROCER'S SON. But he promised.

THE GROCER'S WIFE. He's busy—he can't help you now—so you go on to bed, like a good boy!

THE GROCER'S SON. But . . .

THE GROCER'S WIFE. Look at you—tired half to death. Goodness knows how many miles you tramped this afternoon when school was out, collecting rubber and tin for the government!

THE GROCER'S SON. I got more'n the other guys got! I got the most!

THE GROCER'S WIFE. I know you did, and I'm proud of you—but now you need your rest, so run along! Say good night to Dad—hurry!

THE GROCER'S SON. [*Reluctantly.*] Good night, Dad.

THE GROCER. 'Night, son.

THE GROCER'S SON. [*Disappearing, yawning.*] I sure hope you won't get forced out of business!

[*THE GROCER covers his mouth and yawns too— then shakes his head vigorously and turns back to his books.*]

THE GROCER'S WIFE. What's that about getting forced out of business, John?

THE GROCER. I told him I probably would be—thanks to this new ceiling on food prices!

THE GROCER'S WIFE. You should not do that—talk against the government to a boy twelve years old!

THE GROCER. I guess I hadn't ought to—I'm sorry, Martha, but it's the way I feel, and I'm too dang tired to watch my words. All day in the store—and then this for the past two nights. Freddy's lucky he can go to bed—I can't—not all night tonight, I shouldn't wonder. So don't wait up for me!

THE GROCER'S WIFE. All right, dear. John, is it really so bad, the ceiling, I mean?

THE GROCER. It's pretty tough for lots of reasons. One is that other costs are rising—costs without any ceiling on 'em, and I have to pay those—help, for instance. Do you know I have

to pay my clerk double what I paid a better clerk a year ago?

THE GROCER'S WIFE. Yes, dear, you've often said it, since you had to hire that lazy Bill Truman. . . .

THE GROCER. A year ago, he couldn't keep a job. Now everybody in town wants him, with so many of the boys gone off to camp, so I had to bid high or nothing. And I can't do the work alone. [*He frowns and sighs.*] Though this past week, I must say, I could've!

THE GROCER'S WIFE. Why? Hasn't business been good? You didn't tell me. . . .

THE GROCER. I didn't want to worry you. . . . No, the women are waiting for tomorrow—May 18th—when prices go down again.

THE GROCER'S WIFE. Well, you can't blame them. . . . I never thought about it from the store's point of view, John; I've been doing it, too. I put off getting my new summer dress and the shoes I need. . . .

THE GROCER. There you are! Women! . . . Maybe you can't buy the things at all, if you wait long enough. I won't have any money for you to buy 'em with!

THE GROCER'S WIFE. Now, John, you said yourself, yesterday, that Mrs. Birch, whose husband's a superintendent at the new airplane factory, came in and bought a big order.

THE GROCER. Yes, she did, but after tomorrow I'm going to lose her, my best customer—and do you know why? Because she can't get the way this confounded ceiling works through her head! She thinks I'll be charging the same for food as the cut-rate chain store grocery charges, and if I don't I'm a crook! She dared to say as much, right to my face!

THE GROCER'S WIFE. But couldn't you explain . . . ?

THE GROCER. I *tried* to explain! That the ceiling would be *my* highest prices charged last March, not theirs! Because they're cash and carry, and I deliver. Because they can buy in huge quantity cheaper than I can! But she can't see that!

THE GROCER'S WIFE. The government saw it, John, and pro-

vided for it, so they're really fair, dear.

THE GROCER. Maybe in little things, but, Martha, before this law was passed, we had a chance to prosper for the first time in our lives. I had a chance to make real profits. . . . Here's this town, that used to be a small town. Now it has an airplane factory, and there's lots of money to spend, and more people to spend it, more demand than supply—and if I could only raise my prices to match. . . .

THE GROCER'S WIFE. You can raise them on fruit and fresh vegetables and dairy products and some kinds of meat. . . .

THE GROCER. Yes, and I do, but somebody else gets the profit—don't ask me who. It's not the farmer. He charges me high, because his own costs have gone up—transportation and his hired help and fodder. My customers pay out to me, and I pay out to him, and he pays out to these others . . . and there's no profit. But if I could only raise *all* my prices. . . .

THE GROCER'S WIFE. Wouldn't it be profiteering?

THE GROCER. No! The money's there to be spent, and is being spent, and why shouldn't I have some of it? Martha, do you know how much money they estimate's going to be spent in this country this year? Not counting savings and taxes—eighty-six million dollars! *Eighty-six million*—but we'll be poorer than before!

THE GROCER'S WIFE. Well, it—does sound terrible, dear, when you put it that way . . . but you're so tired, maybe you've mixed things up. . . . John, can't you stop working now?

THE GROCER. No, I can't. I've got to finish the list tonight, and it's past nine, and I'm nowhere near finished. If I'd guessed how long it would take, I'd have . . .

[*From the darkness there now comes a girl's gay voice.*]

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. Dad! Yoo hoo! Dad, where are you?

THE GROCER'S WIFE. There's Betty—I'll tell her you're busy. [*As she disappears into the shadows of the stage.*] Your father's busy, Betty!

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. [*Still unseen.*] I only want to see

him for a minute, Mom! [*She comes into the light. She's eighteen, and pretty, and has just entered from outdoors, with wraps and purse.*] Hi, Dad! I won't stay!

THE GROCER. Hello. What do you want?

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. A dollar! May I have it, please?

THE GROCER. In the morning.

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. No, it's got to be now! I've got to take it over to Sue Cartwright! I had to borrow it from her on the way to the Red Cross benefit play rehearsal, to buy some props with, and I promised she could have it back to-night.

THE GROCER. Well, all right—here, Betty. [*He gives her money from his pocket.*] But be careful and don't spend too much these days!

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. I won't, Dad, thanks. But it's in an awfully good cause, you know! [*She opens her purse, displaying a bulging wad of greenbacks.*]

THE GROCER. Your purse is full of money.

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. [*Laughing.*] Sure! [*She shows him the wad, then puts it back, and the real bill on top, and closes the purse.*] But it's only false, fake money, Dad, for the stage! Just one of the props for our Benefit, that I brought home with me, so it wouldn't get lost!

THE GROCER. I see. . . . Well, run along with you, I've got to work. Good night!

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. [*Disappearing.*] 'Night, angel! [*She calls back from the darkness.*] Wish I could help you!

THE GROCER. [*Alone.*] Nobody can help me. [*He bends over his books again.*] If only somebody could. . . . If only this cursed ceiling didn't exist. . . . Well, now let's see . . . March. . . . Macaroni in March was . . . [*He yawns.*] Small size, eight cents. . . . Large size, ten cents. . . . Is that right? Oh, Lord, I'm so tired, I can't see straight any more . . . The entries blur. . . . [*He nods. His hands drop from the book, and the pages turn, losing the place. With an effort, he sits*

*up, tries to find the place again.] Here, this won't do. . . . Where's that page? . . . Where's March? . . . March . . . March. . . . [His voice grows drowsier, and the mumble turns into march time.] Rice, eight cents . . . March! . . . Peas . . . fourteen a can . . . March! . . . Crackers . . . ten cents a box. . . . [The pencil drops from his hand. His head drops forward on the desk. The lamp begins to dim, and slowly goes out entirely.] March . . . tired . . . everybody . . . got to . . . March! [In the darkness, feet begin to tramp in march time. This will cover the removal of the desk and chair to a corner of the full set, which is masked by a high stack of groceries, poster displays, etc. Meanwhile, THE GROCER'S steady mumble continues from the same spot where he was sitting, but it is growing fainter.] Men . . . marching in camps . . . England and Ireland . . . Iceland, Alaska. . . . March! . . . In Australia . . . Africa . . . China. . . . March. . . . Men. . . . Got to win the war! . . . Ships . . . on the ocean. . . . Planes . . . ceiling zero. . . . Ceiling . . . no ceiling. . . . [The marching feet have stopped. His voice comes up again, excited and strong.] No ceiling! No ceiling! There mustn't be a ceiling! I tell you there mustn't. . . .*

*[The lights now come full up, suddenly, to reveal the grocery store in the full light of day. It is just like any other grocery store, except—it hasn't any ceiling! THE GROCER, in shirt sleeves and apron, is standing where the desk was, staring upward. Then, from the door to the street, downstage left, THE GROCER'S HELPER enters. He is a gangling lad in his early twenties, and all his movements are slow—exaggeratedly slow, because none of this is real now. His voice is slow, too. He has a stack of small, square cards in one hand, and a stack of slightly larger, rectangular cards in the other.]*

THE GROCER'S HELPER. What's the matter, Boss? *[Getting no answer, he comes over and joins THE GROCER, following his gaze upward.]* Hey, where's the ceiling?

THE GROCER. I don't know. The government was going to

put it on today—but it isn't on!

THE GROCER'S HELPER. Say, that's right! . . . There's no ceiling at all!

THE GROCER. It's too good to be true! Now we don't have to put our prices down, Bill! We don't have to—do you hear me?

THE GROCER'S HELPER. Yeah. Then you don't want these new low price cards I brought from the printer's. What'll I do with 'em?

THE GROCER. [*Overjoyed.*] Throw 'em away!

THE GROCER'S HELPER. All right! Whee! . . . [*He sends the small square cards flying all over the store, like a snowfall.*] Want me to put yesterday's prices back?

THE GROCER. No! No, Bill—not on your life!

THE GROCER'S HELPER. Why not? If things are going to cost the same as yesterday. . . .

THE GROCER. They aren't! They're going *up*! Way up—so I can make some money at last! Quick—go back to the printer's and order some new cards! I want 'em in five minutes!

THE GROCER'S HELPER. The printer's busy!

THE GROCER. I've got to have 'em!

THE GROCER'S HELPER. The printer's so busy he asked me to take this set of ceiling prices to the dry goods store down the street. He asked me to deliver 'em for him, but it went clean out of my head, because I'm lazy!

THE GROCER. It doesn't matter now—there won't be a ceiling there, either!

THE GROCER'S HELPER. Say, that's right! I'll throw 'em away, too!

THE GROCER. Wait! Let me see those cards! [*He snatches them from his HELPER.*] One-ninety-five. . . . Three-ninety-five. . . . Ten ninety-five! . . . Just what I want! Come on, Bill! [*He starts feverishly down the counters with the cards.*]

THE GROCER'S HELPER. Huh?

THE GROCER. Help me! [*Puts up a block-printed card.*] A dollar and ninety-five cents for a can of tomatoes, beginning

today! I'll be rich! I'll raise your wages! I'll spend my winter in Florida, and send Freddy to college, and buy Betty a fur coat, and get Martha a couple of servants! Three dollars and ninety-five cents for a small can of vegetable shortening! Ten-ninety-five for a large can! [*As he puts up these outrageous signs, the street door opens, and the LADY CUSTOMER comes in, closing it again behind her. She has prosperity written all over her—in exaggerated ways.*] And seven-ninety-five for . . . Who's that?

THE GROCER'S HELPER. [*Admiringly.*] It's Mrs. Birch, the wife of the superintendent at the airplane factory. She's got money!

THE LADY CUSTOMER. Of course, I've got money! I've never had so much money! I have eighty-six million dollars to spend this year, and I want to spend it! . . . Give me a can of baked beans!

THE GROCER. There's no ceiling today. The price has gone up to five dollars and ninety-five cents.

THE LADY CUSTOMER. Is that all?

THE GROCER. [*Quickly changing cards from the stack in his hand.*] No, I made a mistake—ten dollars ninety-five!

THE LADY CUSTOMER. Good! My husband makes a lot of money, and there's nothing to spend it on, and I want to spend it! How else can I show people I'm rich? I'll take the can, and here's eleven dollars! [*She opens her purse and pays THE GROCER—this should be done with real money which the audience can see.*]

THE GROCER. [*Digging in his pocket.*] Your change! [*He hands her a nickel.*]

THE LADY CUSTOMER. A nickel—what's a nickel? [*She laughs and throws it away. It falls behind the counter.*]

THE GROCER'S HELPER. Yeah, what's a nickel? I wouldn't stoop to pick it up, even if I wasn't lazy! Let it lie!

THE GROCER. What else can I sell you, Mrs. Birch?

THE LADY CUSTOMER. One of everything in the store—how much will that be?

THE GROCER. I don't know, I'd have to sit up nights to figure it out, and I'm tired. . . . So I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll let the order go for a hundred thousand dollars—that all right?

THE LADY CUSTOMER. All right? That's a bargain, it's wonderful! Here you are, Mr. Grocer.

[*She takes from her purse and gives him a stupendous roll of bills topped by real money. As she does so, the street door opens again, and THE GROCER'S WIFE, all excited, hurries in.*]

THE GROCER. [*Turns and sees her.*] Martha! Martha, look—there isn't any ceiling today, after all!

THE GROCER'S WIFE. I know it, John—I went to the dry goods stores to buy my new dress and a pair of shoes—and I found out there!

THE GROCER. I've just made a hundred thousand dollars!

THE GROCER'S WIFE. That's nice, dear, give it to me. It'll do for the down payment on the dress and the shoes! [*She takes the big roll from his hand.*]

THE GROCER. But . . .

THE GROCER'S WIFE. [*Laughing.*] You don't think you're the only one, do you, with no ceiling? I said I'd come and get the money from you, and be right back—but I expected all of it.

THE GROCER. All of . . . how much?

THE GROCER'S WIFE. *Two* hundred thousand! Oh, John, isn't this wonderful? Having money to spend?

THE GROCER. I . . . but I haven't got it to spend, if I make a hundred thousand and you spend twice that!

THE GROCER'S WIFE. You'll make some more, my darling! The day's just begun! You'll make hundreds and hundreds of thousands on your groceries by night!

THE GROCER. Yes, but—if you go and spend them somewhere else, where's my profit?

THE GROCER'S WIFE. You can get it back from the wife of the man who owns the dry goods store!

THE GROCER. But then—where's *his* profit? Where's *any*-

body's profit from the higher prices?

[*The street door opens again to admit THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER.*]

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. Daddy, where are you? Oh, there you are! Hello, Mom! Hello, Bill! Good morning, Mrs. Birch!

THE LADY CUSTOMER. Good morning, Betty.

THE GROCER'S HELPER. Hi!

THE GROCER'S WIFE. Hello, dear, are you going to another rehearsal of the Red Cross Benefit?

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. Yes! We're raising the cost of the tickets to twenty-five dollars apiece. . . . Have you heard, there's no ceiling price on anything? Everybody's going to be rich!

THE GROCER. Betty. . . .

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. What's the matter, Dad? Aren't you rich yet? You will be! I met everybody I knew out on Main Street, and they're all spending at every place they come to! They're all making money by the minute and spending it again by the half-minute! It's the most exciting thing I ever . . . [*Again the street door opens, this time admitting THE GROCER'S SON in his Boy Scout uniform.*] Oh, there's Freddy! Hello, Freddy!

THE GROCER'S SON. Hello, sis,—you're just the person I want to see!

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. What for?

THE GROCER'S SON. Because I'm collecting! For the government!

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. What?

THE GROCER'S SON. False money! Folks are getting out of real money, and the government can't print it fast enough, so they sent us kids out to collect the other kind! Then we're going to distribute it to people, so's they can spend it!

THE GROCER. But—it isn't real, son! It hasn't any buying power!

THE GROCER'S SON. Aw, Dad, you're way behind the times—sure it has! If everybody uses it to buy and sell with, what's

the difference? They're taking it out of children's games, and . . . come on, sis, you've got a wad of it from that stage show—give it to me.

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. Well, . . . [*She takes the false money out of her purse.*] Here!

THE GROCER'S SON. [*Grabbing it.*] Thanks! Gosh, it's all thousand-dollar bills! [*He runs out, banging the street door behind him.*]

THE GROCER. [*Heavily.*] Buying and selling with false money . . . I don't want any of it.

THE GROCER'S WIFE. Oh, cheer up, John, you'll have to take it. That's all there'll be by nightfall! Well, I must go back to the dry goods store and pay my deposit! Good-bye, everybody! [*She goes out.*]

THE GROCER. There goes my hundred thousand dollars, and she still owes a hundred thousand more. Where'm I going to get that? [*The telephone on the counter, rear, beside the cash register, begins to ring.*] Excuse me—got to answer the phone. [*It rings again before he reaches it. Then, through the next little scene, we see him going through the following pantomime in dumb show. He quotes prices into the 'phone, writes down an order, hangs up, starts back to the others, is recalled by another ring from the 'phone, writes another order, etc. He does all this four or five times, each time feverishly fast. Meanwhile.*]

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. Why didn't you answer it, Bill, and save Daddy the trouble when he has a customer?

THE GROCER'S HELPER. Aw, I'm lazy—and anyway he wouldn't let me today—I don't know the new prices yet!

THE LADY CUSTOMER. Aren't you going to the rehearsal, Betty?

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. Yes, I ought to, Mrs. Birch, but I haven't got the false money any more, and they'll expect me to bring it.

THE GROCER'S HELPER. Say, there's a couple of real five-dollar bills in the cash register; would those be any good to you, Betty? I can get 'em for you—they're not big enough to buy anything with today!

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. That's right, go ahead! [*He goes to the cash register and, without disturbing THE GROCER who is still on the 'phone, rings up No Sale and removes the money.*] Isn't that funny, Mrs. Birch—real money having no value?

THE LADY CUSTOMER. It has, if you get enough of it! As long as the war lasts, my husband'll get more and more!

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. I bet he won't! I bet, after today, they'll pay him in false money!

THE LADY CUSTOMER. Oh, they'll have to, won't they, if there's nothing else left in the country? [*Then she brightens.*] But what difference does it make, if I can spend it? No difference at all.

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. [*Taking the two bills and putting them in her purse.*] Thanks, Bill. Just think, yesterday they meant something! Now they're worthless. Well, I must go! Good-bye, Mrs. Birch!

THE LADY CUSTOMER. Good-bye!

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. [*Opening street door.*] 'Bye, Bill!

THE GROCER'S HELPER. 'Bye!  
[*She goes out, closing the door. Meanwhile, THE GROCER has finished his last telephone conversation, and now he comes forward jubilantly.*]

THE GROCER. Listen—listen, folks—I've just sold out my entire stock to the ladies of the town! All of it—at my new prices! I've made a million dollars at this hour of the morning, and I needn't worry about my wife's new dress—I needn't worry about anything! I'm a *millionaire*! It's false money, but who cares, if everybody's going to use it?

THE LADY CUSTOMER. Oh, that's wonderful, Mr. Grocer! Con-

gratulations! Did anybody give you a bigger order than I did?

THE GROCER. All of 'em, Mrs. Birch! Each one bigger than the other!

THE LADY CUSTOMER. [*Piqued.*] Then I want to buy some more! After all, my husband, . . . Let me see, I'll take . . .

THE GROCER'S HELPER. We haven't any more stock!

THE GROCER. I'll order some! I'll call up the wholesaler! [*Starts again for the phone.*] You wait there, Mrs. Birch! I'll have it for you! Anything you want! [*He picks up the 'phone, and the dumb show begins again, with elation at first.*]

THE GROCER'S HELPER. He's a millionaire; are my wages going to go up now—boy!

THE LADY CUSTOMER. If your wages go up, my husband's salary will go up and up and up—and we'll be billionaires! Maybe we are now! [*THE GROCER has had his conversation, and now he hangs up the receiver and comes slowly down; his elation is all gone.*] Did you get your new stock, Mr. Grocer?

THE GROCER. [*His voice heavy again.*] Yes. It'll be here today. But it'll cost me a million dollars. I forgot the wholesaler'd go up, too. I haven't any profit! Not even as much as before! There's no ceiling, but there's no profit, either! Everything's all going up together, like a big, crazy, inflated balloon.

THE LADY CUSTOMER. Oh, I've heard of inflation—but I never knew what it meant!

THE GROCER. [*Hasn't even heard her.*] And where's it going to end? Somebody tell me where this is going to end? [*As if in answer to him, church bells in the distance begin a brassy, joyous clanging. This keeps up to the end of the dream.*]

THE GROCER'S HELPER. What's that?

THE LADY CUSTOMER. It's the church bells in the town! They're ringing together!

THE GROCER'S HELPER. What's it mean?  
[*The door bursts open, and THE GROCER'S SON rushes in with wild excitement.*]

THE GROCER'S SON. Dad! Dad, the war's over! We won! It's over!

THE GROCER. Thank God!

THE GROCER'S HELPER. Hurray!

THE LADY CUSTOMER. Oh, how wonderful! But if the war's over, my husband has lost his job. It was only for the duration. Mr. Grocer, cancel my order, and give me back my hundred thousand dollars!

THE GROCER. I can't. . . . My wife has it. . . . She took it to the dry goods store.

THE GROCER'S WIFE. [*Coming through the open door.*] John, have you heard? The war's over!

THE GROCER. Yes, and we'll celebrate it, Martha. But first, go back to the dry goods store, and cancel the dress and shoes, and bring me Mrs. Birch's money!

THE GROCER'S WIFE. The hundred thousand dollars? Oh, I can't, dear—they haven't got it at the dry goods store. The owner's wife came in and took it and went off to spend it half an hour ago, while I was there. I don't know where it is now!

THE LADY CUSTOMER. You've *got to* get me my money back! I haven't bought anything, and you owe it to me! You've got to!

THE GROCER. Yes. Bill, go over to the government and get me a hundred thousand dollars in false money. . . .

THE GROCER'S SON. No, Dad, don't send him; it's no use any more, now the war's over! They won't give false money! People have got to buy things with real money again! [*He displays the wad he took before.* THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER *enters.*] See? I'm returning this no-good stuff to Betty; where is she?

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. I'm here!

THE GROCER'S HELPER. Boss, I gave her two five-dollar bills a few minutes ago, two real ones! Out of the cash register!

THE GROCER. Give them back, Betty! For Heaven's sake, give them back!

THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER. I can't, Dad! I used them in the rehearsal; one of the characters had to put a match to them, and they got burned up—that's what they were for!

THE GROCER. Burned . . . my last ten dollars. . . . Now I owe everybody—huge sums I can't pay . . . I'm ruined! Ruined!

THE LADY CUSTOMER. So am I! I haven't a cent to my name. . . . Yes, I have, too, *five cents!* Where's the nickel change you gave me? Oh, I remember—it fell on the counter. . . . Five real cents! Let me at it! [*She goes to the counter and begins frantically searching.*] I don't see it. . . . But it's here somewhere! [*She begins throwing off cans and boxes.*]

THE GROCER. Stop!

THE LADY CUSTOMER. [*Not stopping.*] I've got to find my nickel! It's all the money I have in the world! Help me!

THE GROCER'S SON. I'll help! I'm a Boy Scout! [*He runs behind the counter.*] Maybe it's on the shelves up here! [*He begins throwing everything down from the shelves. The din grows deafening.*]

THE GROCER'S HELPER. Hey, let me do that, too! It's fun! [*He starts wildly throwing everything in sight.* THE GROCER'S WIFE is hit, staggers, and falls.]

THE GROCER. My wife! Betty, get the police, quick! [THE GROCER'S DAUGHTER runs out. *The light begins to dim.*] Stop! Stop! [*They don't stop. The stage goes completely black, but the noise of falling objects continues a bedlam, and scuffling feet.*] You've killed her! You've ruined me! Stop! Stop! Stop! [*Sudden silence, and then he moans.*] Stop . . . stop . . . stop. . . .

THE GROCER'S WIFE. [*From the blackness, sharply, anxiously.*] John! . . . [*And the circle of light comes on, showing the desk and chair back in place—and the GROCER collapsed on the desk—while the heavy account books have fallen to the floor. THE GROCER'S WIFE appears and touches him.*] What's going on in here?

THE GROCER. [*Waking up slowly.*] Eh? . . . Oh, Oh, Martha, —is that you?

THE GROCER'S WIFE. Yes, dear, I heard the noise when those account books fell to the floor, and I came to . . . Land sakes, don't stare at me!

THE GROCER. But I thought you were dead. I thought—they'd killed you . . . I must have been asleep.

THE GROCER'S WIFE. You certainly were—all worn out from getting the list of prices for that horrid old ceiling!

THE GROCER. Horrid. . . . Martha, let me tell you something. Don't you call it that. I know better now. I know why the government's doing it, and I know how it's necessary; and if I ever kick again at the little sacrifice I personally have to make! . . . Martha, I had a dream. I guess it was a nightmare, but it had a kind of sense. All the things that happened before I fell asleep over my books got together and made this sense. I saw what would happen to the country if there wasn't any ceiling put on prices now. I saw that no one at all would gain from higher prices. I saw the value of money go down, and inflation come, bringing false and ruinous values, and I'm here to tell you, my girl, that ceiling's going to save the country. Every one of us—tradesman and customer—ought to be glad it's here!

THE END



**A VISIT FROM AUNT HARRIET**

**By**

**LIONEL A. WALFORD**

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# A VISIT FROM AUNT HARRIET

## CAST

BEATRICE BEANE, *the wife*

PROFESSOR LEONARD BEANE, *the husband*

HELGA, *the maid*

HARRIET, *the aunt*

## A VISIT FROM AUNT HARRIET

*The living room of the BEANES. It is remarkably untidy in an intellectual way, with books and papers strewn about, higgledy-piggledy. A desk is covered with unfinished manuscripts of the PROFESSOR; the table is strewn with precious litter. There is a door, leading to a stairway that leads to the attic. When opened, it reveals a stairway jammed with boxes and other trash that has been pushed out of the way. There is a tall cabinet on one wall, and there is a chest. The arrangement of these things is unimportant to the action of the play. There is a door leading to the outside, and a door leading to the other parts of the house. One wall is covered with bookshelves, and a tall stepladder stands handy, so that one may reach the topmost shelves. There are gaps in the rows of books, left by books that are now stacked on the floor. The whole atmosphere of the room is one of untidiness and carelessness.*

*The time is late afternoon; the room is empty a moment. Then MRS. BEANE enters, a woman of about forty, dressed in rather frou-frou clothes. Her arms are full of packages, which she dumps on to the table.*

MRS. B. [*Calls.*] Helga! Hel-ga!

HELGA. [*From kitchen.*] Marm?

MRS. B. Come take these things, Helga.

HELGA. [*Enters. She is a frowsy slattern, who works part time for the BEANES.*] Huh?

MRS. B. Take these to the kitchen when you go. Oh, Helga, I have had the most wonderful afternoon at my class in flower

arrangement. Get me a dish. Let me see [*She goes into a trance.*] . . . that blue bowl with the chrysanthemums painted on it. Is it chrysanthemums or chrysanthema? I never can remember. [*HELGA is sullenly looking in a china closet for the bowl.*] You know the bowl.

HELGA. No, I don't.

MRS. B. Look in that closet over there. [*Pointing to the tall cabinet. She unwraps a package of flowers.*] Don't you love these? [*Smelling.*] It's spring, Helga, spring. [*HELGA has shuffled over to the tall cabinet and opened it. Out falls an amazing collection of objects. A number of insect boxes—the PROFESSOR'S—some books, coats, and a human skeleton.*] Oh, there it is, Helga, at the bottom. Do you see? Under that picture. [*HELGA hands her the bowl.*] Now watch what I do.

HELGA. [*Matter-of-factly picks up the skeleton by the middle with one hand, and some boxes with the other.*] Don't think I can get these things back again, Marm.

MRS. B. Oh, Leonard's things. Ah, well, put them in the attic, Helga. It is time we cleaned out that closet, anyway. [*She is arranging the flowers at the table.*] D'you see what I do? The tall ones go in the back, the short ones in front. And don't let the flowers extend over the edge of the bowl. That is the important thing. [*She makes the arrangement with little bird-like sounds of approval as HELGA opens the attic door, throws the things on top of the pile on the stairs, and shuts the door.*]

HELGA. How many potatoes do you want for dinner, Marm?

MRS. B. Oh, Helga. I forgot to tell you the wonderful surprise. We're having company for dinner.

HELGA. We ain't got enough stuff for company 'tonight, Marm.

MRS. B. We have plenty, I'm sure.

HELGA. No, we ain't.

MRS. B. Oh, yes, we have. I bought a steak for ourselves. Our guest is to be the Professor's Aunt Harriet. She's a very old

lady, and I am sure she won't want anything more than a soft boiled egg, a piece of toast, and a cup of tea.

HELGA. How many potatoes you want I should cook, Marm?

MRS. B. [*Groping.*] Oh? Well, *you* know. Two or three apiece, I should think. And Helga. We must be very quiet while Miss Harriet is with us. You see, she's an invalid, and she's a war refugee. From Bangkok, of all places. Isn't it romantic? The Professor hasn't seen her since he was a little boy. He didn't even know she was living. Oh, we're so thrilled about it all.

HELGA. Do you want I should fix the pudding for tonight, Marm?

MRS. B. Yes, that will do; and a small custard for Miss Harriet. And, Helga. She will want to go to bed early, and have a nice, hot waterbag. Oh, Helga, we must be so good to her, so kind, because, you see, she has suffered; and I always say, when one has suffered, one—

HELGA. Where are you going to put her up, Marm?

MRS. B. Oh? Ah—I thought the front bedroom would be nice for her. It is so cheerful and quiet. And it has the bath and all.

HELGA. What do you want I should do with the turtles, then, Marm?

MRS. B. Turtles? What do you mean, turtles?

HELGA. The professor's been keeping some turtles in the bathtub o' that room this past month.

MRS. B. Oh, yes. I'd forgotten the turtles. Oh, just put them in the attic, Helga. That's a dear.

HELGA. Ain't much more room in the attic, Marm.

MRS. B. Well, then, just do the best you can, Helga. You can't expect me to think of everything. You must—improvise. We must remember what the Swami said last year at those lectures. You remember those lectures I told you about last year, Helga, don't you?

HELGA. That bathtub better be scrubbed out before the old

lady gets into it.

MRS. B. [*Continuing.*] One must improvise as one goes through life, and above all, at any cost, one must be tranquil. Now we must tidy the room a bit so it will look nice for Miss Harriet. Help me clear up this litter, Helga. [*She gathers up a heap of papers from the table.*] Now open the door to the attic for me. That's right. Why, there's *plenty* of room, Helga. [*The two women cram various objects of untidiness onto the attic stairs and shut the door.*] There! Doesn't that look better? Now where will I put my flower arrangement? Here, I think. [*On the desk.*] Look, Helga, how that simply dramatizes the whole room. It focuses people's attention on that spot. It's little things like that will delight Aunt Harriet, I know. Now where's a duster? In that closet over there. [*HELGA opens chest. More litter, mostly rags.*] That black piece will do. Wait a minute. I wonder if I could make something of it. [*She holds it up to herself.*] No, I suppose not. Use that to dust around a bit, will you, Helga? [*HELGA drags the cloth listlessly about the room.*] There, the room looks nice and restful, I think. Aunt Harriet will appreciate that. Rest. That's what she will need. And quiet.

HELGA. Shall I fix the potatoes now, Mrs. Beane?

MRS. B. Yes, Helga, you may start dinner now. [*Exit HELGA.*

MRS. BEANE *continues to make little adjustments about the room, putting more things up the attic stairs. Call.*] What are these oily rags, Helga?

HELGA. [*Calling from the kitchen.*] The perffessor was cleaning something, I think, Marm.

MRS. B. Cleaning something! I wonder what it could have been? Now what shall I do with them? Ah, yes. [*Up the attic stairs.*] And what are these? Cartridges! Ts! Ts! Ts! [*These too go up the attic stairs, and MRS. BEANE has to cram things in tightly to get everything in and close the door.*] Lovely. It looks perfectly lovely. [*Now she goes to the window and breathes in deeply, speaking as she exhales.*] Love. Happiness.

Beauty. [*Enter the PROFESSOR, a rather harried looking, cadaverous man, who peers out from beneath thick eyebrows.*] Darling! [*They kiss.*] I haven't been able to wait till you saw it.

PROF. Saw what, dear?

MRS. B. This. [*The flower arrangement.*] Isn't it effective there? I think it is perfectly lovely.

PROF. Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes. Quite, quite. [*He looks at the flowers for the first time.*] What is that on it? [*Takes a small magnifier from his pocket, breaks off a stem, not hearing MRS. BEANE'S stifled "Dear!" and examines it.*] Could that be a new smut disease? Most peculiar. Where did you get it?

MRS. B. From a bush over in Mrs. Higgins' garden. Dear! Could it be a new species? You could name it after me.

PROF. Oh, yes, yes; yes, yes, yes. Must get over to look at it.

MRS. B. But not now, darling. Aunt Harriet will be here any minute, and you really ought to fix yourself up a bit for her. Comb your hair, anyway.

PROF. Oh, quite, quite. I'd forgotten about her. Queer thing her turning up. Thought she was dead.

MRS. B. I know. It's like a gift from heaven. And it will be so nice for her, after what she's been through, the war, and all, to have peace and quiet.

PROF. Mm.

MRS. B. I'm giving her the front bedroom.

PROF. Yes, yes, yes, ye— Hold on. You can't. I've some turtles in there.

MRS. B. I know. I'll put them in the attic, just for tonight. We can find a better place tomorrow.

PROF. But, Beatrice. One of those turtles is a type genus and species.

MRS. B. I know, dear. We'll find them in the morning, your type genuses and your type specieses. Now comb your hair. Here, give me the comb. Let me fix it. And remember, dear, we must be gentle with her.

PROF. With whom, dear?

MRS. B. Aunt Harriet. Turn around. Let me fix your tie. Poor little old lady. She will need tranquility, and protection and restoration. I plan to take her over to my club tomorrow, and we're going to have her give us a talk about her experiences in Rangoon.

PROF. Bangkok, dear.

MRS. B. Bangkok, I mean. There, you look quite nice. [*A knock at the door.*] That's probably Aunt Harriet now. [*She assumes the peculiar beneficent look reserved for old ladies, and opens the door. There stands AUNT HARRIET.*]

HAR. [*A horsy, big, powerful-looking woman of about 60. She is dressed in a bright-checked tweed suit with hat to match; wears a monocle, and carries a swagger stick and a small leather grip.*] Are you Mrs. Bean?

MRS. B. [*Recovering rapidly from the shock of the first view.*] Yes, and you're Aunt Harriet? [*Cooing.*] Do come in. We are so glad to have you. Give me your things. [*Helps her in.*]

HAR. Don't hang on to me like that, young woman. I'm perfectly capable of walking. Who's this? [*Striking the PROFESSOR in the stomach with the stick.*] Tom?

PROF. I'm Leonard.

HAR. Leonard. Hm! You were Tom when you were a boy—

PROF. But—

HAR. [*Hitting him in the stomach with her stick, again.*] Stand up straight. Do you still play rugger? You don't. Played rugger when I knew you.

PROF. But, Aunt Harriet, that was 35 years ago.

HAR. Nothing of the sort. Let me look at you. Come here and stand in the light. I think you look better now than you did then at that. Did you ever give up drinking? You should, you know. Bad for you. I had to. Stomach ulcers.

MRS. B. Why—

HAR. And this is Clara, I suppose. [*This is a severe shock to MRS. BEANE, and she shows it.*]

MRS. B. Beatrice.

HAR. [*To the PROF.*] What became of Clara? She was a nice little thing when she was off the stage. Oh, well. Never mind. Young people are different now-a-days, and I'm an old woman. [*She sits.*] Now sit down here beside me and tell me all about yourselves. What are you doing, Tom?

PROF. Leonard, Aunt Harriet.

HAR. Oh, very well, Leonard. What are you doing?

PROF. Why, I am teaching at Parkhurst College; I am a zoologist, and just now I am writing a monograph on the mealy bugs of western Ontario.

HAR. What I mean is, what are you *doing*? Home guard? Air raid warden? Red Cross work? Auxiliary police? Volunteer Fire Department? Bomb Squad? And Clara, what are you doing? You're in the women's motor corps, of course. Or is it home nursing?

MRS. B. Well—uh—you see, Aunt Harriet. We—uh—feel that—uh—well, the war is very remote, and those things are, after all, silly, don't you think? I mean to say that all those things are all right as propaganda if people *need* propaganda. But we don't, don't you see?

HAR. No, I don't see.

PROF. What Beatrice means, Aunt Harriet—

HAR. Say, what kind of a house is this? Who's Beatrice?

PROF. My wife.

HAR. Her? Thought her name was Clara.

PROF. No, it is Beatrice. And what she means is that we feel that our best contribution is to live a normal life in these trying times.

MRS. B. To be tranquil.

HAR. In short, you are both doing nothing.

PROF. After all, the war is so remote.

HAR. Remote my eye. They thought it was remote in Paris. They thought it was remote in Norway. They thought it was remote in Pearl Harbor. They thought it was remote in Singapore. There are no remote places in this tiny world. Ah well,

I'll soon get you both stirred up. I have been places and I have seen things; and I know what I am talking about. Tomorrow afternoon Clara and I can go exploring about and see what we can find to do.

MRS. B. But, Aunt Harriet, tomorrow afternoon is my club meeting.

HAR. Your club fiddlesticks. We'll do as I say. You know, I took a first aid course on the ship coming over. It's great stuff. Just lie down on the floor and I'll show you how I can pick you up. Just lie down on the floor.

MRS. B. But, Aunt Har—

HAR. Go on. Lie down on the floor. I won't hurt you.  
[Takes off her jacket and gloves. Opens her bag and puts them away. The PROFESSOR and MRS. BEANE stare at each other over her stooped figure. Then the PROFESSOR looks into her bag.]

PROF. What's that?

HAR. What? Oh, that. It's only a beetle. Came all the way from Bangkok, I guess.

PROF. Let me have it.

[He takes a cyanide bottle from his pocket, puts the beetle in, and during the ensuing action, examines it with his magnifier over by the bookshelves. Then he hunts for a book about beetles.]

HAR. [Meanwhile, to MRS. B.] Now lie down.

[MRS. B. looks imploringly at the PROFESSOR, who doesn't see her, and lies down.]

MRS. B. Like this?

HAR. Yes. Now see how easy it is. First I pick you up this way. Relax, for pity sake. You're supposed to be unconscious. [She lifts MRS. BEANE on to her shoulder.] See?

MRS. B. Ooh!

HAR. Don't be scared. Look, Tom. This is the fireman's lift.

PROF. [Not looking.] Mm. [Looking.] What's wrong?

HAR. The fireman's lift. That's the sort of thing I'll have you learning. Just give me a week.

MRS. B. [*Weakly.*] A week?

HAR. [*Deposits MRS. BEANE on the floor.*] Now where's my room? Want to wash up a bit. Don't move. I'll find it. [*Opens door to attic, out fall quantities of rubbish.*] Good heavens, what's this? Tom! What's the meaning of this rat's nest?

PROF. Hm? That's only the attic, Aunt Harriet.

HAR. Attic? It's a garbage pile, that's what it is. Look at this rubbish. What are all these boxes?

PROF. Now, don't trouble about those. They are my butterflies.

HAR. And those oily rags! What are they doing here? It's an arson plot. [*Looks sharply at the PROFESSOR.*] What's the trouble, son? Broke? Spent all your money on drink, I suppose, and now you are trying to start a fire in your attic so you can collect the insurance. . . .

MRS. B. How dare you say such things. . . .

HAR. That will do, young woman. You can't tell me you call this housekeeping? What would you do if there were an air raid and an incendiary bomb hit the house and lodged up in that augean stable?

PROF. Hm?

HAR. And don't say "hm" to me. You heard me.

PROF. Oh, yes, yes, yes, quite. But it's all so remote, Aunt Harriet. There's no need for hysteria. You're not in Bangkok now.

MRS. B. You're here, where it's safe.

HAR. Safe! Safe in a fire trap. Look, Tom.

PROF. Please, my name is Leonard.

HAR. Ho, very well! Now look, Tom. Suppose it were not so safe as you think, and an incendiary bomb did land in your house. What would you do? Hey?

PROF. That's perfectly simple. I would call the necessary authorities, of course, collect my manuscripts as quickly as possible, and leave the house.

HAR. Oh, my great aunt! [*Mocking him.*] "Collect the manu-

scripts as quickly as possible and leave the house." You dolt! You're no better than your father. And you certainly have a lot to learn. Now where's my bedroom? I want to wash. [*The BEANES dumbly escort her to the bedroom, HARRIET talking all the while, her voice fading into the distance.*] You know, we'll never win this war if we take this passive attitude. You *don't* leave the house. You stay and fight the fire and put it out. That's the whole principle of this war.

[*The room is empty a moment. Then HELGA comes in to set the table for dinner. She picks up the rubbish over at the attic door and pushes it back in. Then she works a moment over the table and goes back to the kitchen. HARRIET then comes in for her bag, which she had left. She looks around the room. Looks up the attic stairs. Is disgusted. Gets an idea. Goes to the telephone, which is near the door to the hallway. Looks up a number, dials it.*]

HAR. Hello. Is this the Fire Department? Let me speak to the Chief, please. Hello, Fire Chief? This is Harriet Bean speaking.

[*We hear no more, because she moves into the hall with the phone and closes the door. HELGA continues to set the table, and the PROFESSOR and MRS. BEANE enter.*]

PROF. [*As he enters.*] I tell you I never heard of Clara! [*He goes to the tall ladder before the bookshelves. MRS. BEANE is by now not speaking to the PROFESSOR. She helps HELGA with the dinner things. Enter HARRIET as HELGA goes out.*]

HAR. Just telephoning an old friend. Mm. What's for dinner? Steak, I'll be bound. I hope you got a good thick one. Cook it rare, Josephine, or whatever your name is. I like the blood running out of it. [*Enter HELGA.*] And who is this? Sadie? You've gotten fat, Sadie.

MRS. B. This is Helga, Aunt Harriet.

HAR. Helga. Nothing is the same as it was. Well, Helga, I'll tell you one thing. In my entire life, I've never seen such a preposterously incompetent, untidy nincompoop as you.

MRS. B. Please, Aunt Harriet. . . . I'll finish here, Helga.

HELGA. You certainly will, Mrs. Beane. I'm quittin' right now.

HAR. You're doing no such thing. Now go out into the kitchen and finish cooking that steak. [HELGA and HARRIET eye each other venomously in a clash of wills, and HELGA loses. She retires into the kitchen.] Hm! [The PROFESSOR is now on top of the ladder with a book out, sitting, reading.] Now about these incendiary bombs—

MRS. B. Please, Aunt Harriet. Can't we go into that another time?

[An air raid signal.]

HAR. Listen. What's that?

PROF. Hm? Just an air raid alarm, dear. A practice, probably. Or maybe they're moving troops. Just turn out the lights.

MRS. B. It all seems so ridiculous.

HAR. Don't you have blackout curtains?

MRS. B. No, we merely turn out the lights. It's simplest. [She turns out the lights.]

HAR. Simplest my foot. You can't sit in the dark all evening. Listen. What's that?

PROF. Someone outside.

MRS. B. The air-raid warden, probably. They like to . . . [There is a crash of glass. A hissing noise, and an "incendiary bomb" falls into the room from the window. MRS. BEANE screams. HELGA screams. "Fire, fire, police, help," etc. The PROFESSOR falls down the ladder. Everyone is running this way and that. Nobody can find the door. The PROFESSOR rushes to the telephone. He is so excited he can hardly speak. He stutters frantically into the telephone.]

PROF. Is this the operator? Get me the Fire Department. . . . Get me the Police Department. . . . Get me anybody. Oh dear! The lines are busy. Quick. We must get out of this house. Oh, my butterflies. The turtles. Where are the turtles? Beatrice! Beatrice, speak to me! She's fainted.

HAR. I'll get her out of it, Tom. I know just what to do. [The

*all clear signal. Lights on.*] Oh, it's over already. Get me my purse over there. I've some aromatic spirits of ammonia. There you are.

[MRS. BEANE *comes to.*]

HAR. There you are. You were frightened. Feel better?

MRS. B. What happened?

HAR. Only some harmless fireworks, dear, to show you how you would really behave in an emergency.

PROF. It's an outrage. I'll complain to the authorities, I'll—

HAR. You'll do nothing of the sort. I arranged all this myself. And if there's any complaining done, I'll have the Fire Chief come over and look at your attic. Now you see what you'd do if an incendiary bomb hit your house. In the first place, you'd lose your heads. That's wrong. Then you'd call the Fire Department and the Police Department; and you'd find their lines all busy, because there would be so many fires all over town that they wouldn't have time to attend to everybody at once. Besides that, they don't answer any outside calls during black-out except from sector headquarters. You see, Tom, you were not calm. You couldn't even think of your precious manuscripts. And you, Clara, you fainted. And you, Sadie, you just ran up and down screaming. Actually, if there had been a real incendiary bomb, and not just a fake, where would it have fallen? In your attic, that's where. And how would you have gotten up there to fight it with all that rubbish lying in the way?

PROF. Quite. Quite. I do believe, Beatrice, after careful consideration, that Aunt Harriet's point is very well taken. There is much in what she says. It is clear that the question now to be settled is, what *should* we do?

HAR. Shake. [*She pumps the PROFESSOR's hand.*] The first sign of sense I've seen in you. Do you really want to know how to put out an incendiary bomb?

PROF. Yes, I believe I do.

HAR. [*To MRS. BEANE.*] Do you?

MRS. B. Yes, I do.

HAR. [*To HELGA.*] And you?

HELGA. Sure.

HAR. Excellent. We will begin by having dinner. Then we are going to clean out that Vesuvius upstairs.

PROF.

MRS. B. } You mean tonight? Tonight? [*Etc.*]

HELGA. }

HAR. [*Grimly.*] Tonight. We can all work at it; and I'll call in some outside help. There's a house-cleaning service that should do the job in no time. [*Patient consternation.*]

[*The curtain is lowered a moment.*]

[*When the curtain rises, it reveals a changed house. The attic has been cleared out, and the entire place exudes an atmosphere of order and tidiness. A bucket of sand stands in a corner, and a long-handled shovel is nearby. The PROFESSOR, MRS. BEANE, and HELGA are exhausted. HARRIET is still fresh.*]

MRS. B. I'm exhausted.

HELGA. The worst job I've ever had in my whole life yet.

PROF. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes; quite, quite, quite.

HAR. But it's finished. The attic is no longer a fire trap. [*Opens door, revealing a clean passage to the attic.*] There are no other places where papers or rags are accumulated to start spontaneous fire. [*Opens chest and closet—both neat.*] Books all in order, incidentally, and your butterflies where you can get at them. Now, what do you think of your old Aunt Harriet?

PROF. I can say only one thing about you, Aunt Harriet. You're dynamic.

HAR. Nonsense. Sand in that bucket—dry sand, too. A shovel nearby; and a coiled hose within easy reach outside that window. Now children, I've told you many times what to do. We've rehearsed it five times. Shall we do it again?

PROF.

MRS. B. } No. We know. Not at all. No— No—

HELGA. }

HAR. Very well. Let's have one rehearsal, then go to bed.

PROF.

MRS. B. } Now? You mean now? Oh, dear, *now*?

HELGA. }

HAR. Right now. Very well. Let us say we have a blackout. We have no blackout curtains now, but you're going to have those next week, soon as you can get the material. So, let's pretend for now that we have them, and that we now draw them. Now let's say this book is an incendiary bomb. All right. [*Throws down book.*] Crash! Bang! It falls to the floor, throwing out hot metal in all directions as it burns. Let's see what you do. [*As she talks, the others act out her directions.*] Tom snatches a chair to protect his face, and quick as he can run—hurry, you snail—immediately goes as close as he dares to see what type of bomb it is. If he notices the bomb has a separate explosive head, he knows the bomb is of a type that will explode within seven minutes, and he hurries everyone out of the house as fast as they can go. [*The professor has decided that the bomb is of that type, and he gestures MRS. BEANE and HELGA out of the room.*] They will now have to fight the fire from outside the house. In England now, many people do that anyway. All right, that was very good. Come back, everybody! Let's say this bomb is not obviously of an explosive type. Tom lies on the floor. He adjusts the nozzle of the hose to a steady stream of water, and directs the stream around the room, wherever the fire is burning. [*The PROFESSOR points the hose as she directs, and hisses to suggest the sound of water.*] He does not work on the bomb yet. He puts out the fire that is consuming the curtains, the books, the woodwork. The fire has now been put out all around the bomb. All right, Tom, go to work on the bomb, but keep a safe distance from it. Notice that he directs the stream on the part of the bomb nearest him first, so as to force the fumes away from him. The steady stream of water hastens combustion of the bomb, causing it to blow up, and in doing so, it scatters fire around the room, which Tom quickly ex-

tinguishes with water. Now the bomb has burned out. Helga hands Tom the axe—well, hand it to him! Tom chops into the floor, directing the stream of water under the boards to make sure the fire is quite out. Of course you will remember, children, that this procedure applies only to one type of bomb. And you have got to learn everything you can about all the others. So next Monday night, I expect to see you all down at the night school enrolled in a course in Incendiary Defense.

[*Dropping her lecture manner.*] There! Now—don't you think I'd make a good circus barker? You did very well, Tom. Now I can feel safe sleeping here. Now, dear Tom and Clara, let's go to bed.

PROF. ER—Aunt Harriet. There is just one thing I wish to make clear. My name is Leonard. It is not Tom. And this is Beatrice, not Clara.

HAR. Most peculiar. Probably got it from your father. He was certainly a peculiar man. Died of drink.

PROF. He was certainly not peculiar, and he did not die of drink. He is living now, and he is an eminent authority on astro-physics.

HAR. Your father? Don't be absurd. *Your father?* Say! How do you spell your name?

PROF. B-e-a-n-e.

HAR. Good heavens! I spell mine B-e-a-n. We're not even related. I don't know you. There's a mistake. You're the wrong Beans. Where's a telephone book? [MRS. B. *gets her one.*] I knew I couldn't be related to such people. Why, here it is. Tom Bean. 34 Park Drive. Where's my hat? Where's my bag? [MR. BEANE *dumbly goes to the closet and gets them for her.*] I thought any nephew of mine would know how to put out an incendiary bomb. [She stalks out. THE BEANES, cowering before her rage, are left, staring at each other in speechless amazement.]



WHERE BUT IN AMERICA

By

OSCAR M. WOLFF

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## WHERE BUT IN AMERICA

"Where But in America" was originally produced by the Players' Workshop of Chicago, on April 23, 1917.

### ORIGINAL CAST

MRS. ESPENHAYNE .....	Caroline Kohl
MR. ESPENHAYNE .....	George Francis Wolff
HILDA .....	Helen Cook

The play has been rewritten especially for inclusion in  
PLAYS OF DEMOCRACY.

TIME: Early in 1943.

SCENE: The Espenhayne dining-room.

## WHERE BUT IN AMERICA

*The curtain rises on the ESPENHAYNE dining-room. It is furnished with modest taste and refinement. There is a door, center, leading to the living-room, and a swinging-door, left, leading to the kitchen.*

*The table is set, and ROBERT and MOLLIE ESPENHAYNE are discovered at their evening meal. They are educated, well-bred young Americans. ROBERT is a pleasing, energetic business man of thirty; MOLLIE an attractive woman of twenty-five. The bouillon cups are before them as the curtain rises.*

MOLLIE. I had a letter from Grace Caldwell today. She says that house Tom bought out Alexandria way is just an old ruin. She's so sorry that she and the children didn't stay here.

BOB. That reminds me, Mollie; I heard from the man who owns that house in Winnetka. He won't rent. He says now is the time for him to sell.

MOLLIE. I really don't care, Bob. You were right; it would take all our gas just to get to the station and the shops. Of course, if you could get a C card—

BOB. A C card! You don't ask much for a lawyer. You tell me how to get a B card!

MOLLIE. But, Bob, I've been terribly stupid.

BOB. How so, Mollie?

MOLLIE. You remember the Russells moved to Highland Park last spring?

BOB. Yes; Ed Russell rented a house that had just been built.

MOLLIE. A perfectly darling little house! And Fanny Russell told me several months ago that the man who built it is doing work for the government, so he can get lumber, and plumbing, and all those things without any trouble.

BOB. For the government, Mollie; for the government! Not for the Espenhaynes.

MOLLIE. Well, the whole thing flashed into my mind this morning when I read Grace Caldwell's letter. I sat down at once and sent a special delivery letter to Fanny Russell. I asked her to tell me his name and where we can find him.

BOB. Mollie, I still think we must give up this idea of the suburbs until the war is over. There's the gas rationing; and prices going up every day; and the draft board may still drag me out from behind a wife and two small daughters.

MOLLIE. It can do no harm to talk to the man. Fanny Russell thinks every detail of their house is perfect. We can look at property and we can be thinking about plans.

BOB. I'm afraid there are too many other things to think about now.

[BOB and MOLLIE have now both finished the bouillon course and lay down their spoons. MOLLIE reaches to touch the table button and at the same time leans across the table and speaks very impressively.]

MOLLIE. Bob, I am about to ring for Hilda.

BOB. What of it?

MOLLIE. [*Decidedly and with a shrug of impatience.*] Oh, Bob, don't be so aggravating! You know very well, what of it. I don't want Hilda to hear us say *one* word about moving out of the city. You talk about war problems—

BOB. [*Protesting.*] But, Mollie—

MOLLIE. [*Interrupting hurriedly and holding her finger to her lips in warning.*] Psst! [*The next instant HILDA enters, left. She is a tall, blond Swedish girl, about twenty-five years old. She is very pretty and carries herself well and looks particularly charming in a maid's dress, with white collar and cuffs and a dainty waitress's apron. Every detail of her dress is immaculate. MOLLIE speaks the instant that HILDA appears and talks very rapidly all the time that HILDA remains in the room. While she speaks MOLLIE watches HILDA rather than ROBERT, whom she*

*pretends to be addressing.*] There was certainly a hub-bub at the Red Cross sewing today. Everybody had a different idea about the ration points. Gert Jones is simply sunk. You know she can't add two and two. When we used to play bridge we never let her keep score. I don't know what she's going to do with this point rationing. That grocer she trades with will cheat her out of every point in her book.

*[As MOLLIE begins her flow of words BOB first looks at her in open-mouthed astonishment. Then as he gradually comprehends that MOLLIE is merely talking against time, he, too, turns his eyes to HILDA and watches her closely in her movements around the table. Meanwhile HILDA moves quietly and quickly and pays no attention to anything except the work she has in hand. She carries a small serving tray and, as MOLLIE speaks, HILDA first takes the bouillon cups from the table, then brings the carving-knife and fork from the sideboard and places them before ROBERT and then, with the empty bouillon cups, exits left. ROBERT and MOLLIE are both watching HILDA as she goes out. The instant the door swings shut behind her, MOLLIE relaxes with a sigh and ROBERT leans across the table to speak.]*

BOB. Mollie, why not be sensible about this thing? There's nothing to hide. You know we won't be moving for at least a year.

MOLLIE. Bob, Hilda could walk right out of here any day and get a position with people who will never move, as long as they live. I don't know what I'd do without Hilda. *[More cheerfully.]* But there, we won't think of those disagreeable things until we have to.

BOB. That's good American doctrine.

MOLLIE. *[Warningly, and again touching her finger to her lips.]* Psst! *[HILDA enters, left, carrying the meat plates, with a heavy napkin under them. Immediately resuming her monologue.]* I think my last year's hat will do very nicely. You know it rained all last summer and I really only wore the hat a half a dozen times. Perhaps not that often. I can make a few changes

on it; put on some new flowers, you know, and it will do very nicely for another year. You remember that hat, don't you, dear? [ROBERT starts to answer, but MOLLIE rushes right on.] Of course you do; you remember you said it was so becoming. That's another reason why I want to wear it this summer.

[HILDA, meanwhile, puts the plates on the table in front of ROBERT and goes out, left. MOLLIE at once stops speaking.]

BOB. [*Holding his hands over the plates as over a fire and rubbing them together in genial warmth.*] Ah, the good hot plates! She never forgets them. She is a gem, Mollie.

MOLLIE. [*In great self-satisfaction.*] If you are finally convinced of that, after three years, I wish you would be a little bit more careful what you say the next time Hilda comes into the room.

BOB. [*In open-mouthed astonishment.*] What!

MOLLIE. Well, I don't want Hilda to think that we are making plans behind her back.

BOB. [*Reflectively.*] "A man's home is his castle." [*Pauses.*] It's very evident that the Englishman who first said that didn't keep any servants.

[*Telephone bell rings off stage.*]

MOLLIE. Answer that, Bob.

BOB. Won't Hilda answer it?

MOLLIE. [*Standing up quickly and speaking impatiently.*] Very well, I shall answer it myself. I can't ask Hilda to run to the telephone while she is serving the meal.

BOB. [*Sullenly, as he gets up.*] All right! All right!

[BOB exits, center. As he does so, HILDA appears at the door, left, hurrying to answer the telephone.]

MOLLIE. Mr. Espenhayne will answer it, Hilda.

[HILDA makes the slightest possible bow of acquiescence, withdraws left, and in a moment reappears with vegetable dishes and small side dishes, which she puts before MOLLIE. She is arranging these when BOB re-enters, center.]

BOB. Somebody for you, Hilda.

HILDA. [*Surprised.*] For me? Oh! But I cannot answer eet now.

Please ask the party to call later.

[HILDA speaks excellent English, but with some Swedish accent. The noticeable feature of her speech is the precision and great care with which she enunciates every syllable.]

MOLLIE. Just take the number yourself, Hilda, and tell the party you will call back after dinner.

HILDA. Thank you, Meeses Aispenhayne.

[HILDA exits, center. BOB stands watching HILDA as she leaves the room, and then turns and looks at MOLLIE with a bewildered expression.]

BOB. [Standing at his chair.] But I thought Hilda couldn't be running to the telephone while she serves the dinner.

MOLLIE. But this call is for Hilda, herself. That's quite different, you see.

BOB. [Slowly and thoughtfully.] Oh, yes! Of course! I see! [Sits down in his chair.] That is—I don't quite see!

MOLLIE. [Immediately leaning across the table and speaking in a cautious whisper.] Do you know who it is? [BOB closes his lips very tightly and nods yes in an important manner. MOLLIE, in the same whisper and very impatiently.] Who?

BOB. [Looking around the room as if to see if anyone is in hiding and then putting his hand to his mouth and exaggerating the whisper.] The Terrible Swede.

MOLLIE. [In her ordinary tone and much exasperated.] Robert, I've told you a hundred times you shouldn't refer to—to the man in that way.

BOB. And I've told you a hundred times to ask Hilda his name. If I knew his name I'd announce him with as much ceremony as if he were the Swedish Ambassador.

MOLLIE. [Disgusted.] Oh, don't try to be funny! Suppose some day Hilda hears you speak of him in that manner?

BOB. You know that's mild compared to what you think of him. Suppose some day Hilda learns what you think of him?

MOLLIE. I think very well of him, and you know it. Of course, I dread the time when she marries him, but I wouldn't for the

world have her think that we speak disrespectfully of her or her friends. I did think maybe they had broken up. He hasn't been here for at least two months. [MOLLIE and BOB sit back in their chairs to await HILDA's return. Both sit with fingers interlaced, hands resting on the edge of the table in the attitude of school children at attention. A long pause. MOLLIE unclasps her hands and shifts uneasily. BOB does the same. MOLLIE, seeing this, hastily resumes her former attitude of quiet waiting. BOB, however, grows increasingly restless. His restlessness makes MOLLIE nervous and she watches BOB, and when he is not observing her, she darts quick, anxious glances at the door, center. BOB drains and refills his glass. MOLLIE has been watching BOB and every time he shifts or moves she unconsciously does the same and finally she breaks out nervously.] I don't understand this at all! This is Tuesday.

BOB. What of it?

MOLLIE. He used to telephone on Wednesdays and come to see her on Saturdays.

BOB. And take her to the movies on Thursdays and to dances on Sundays. He's merely extending his line of attack.

[Another long pause, then BOB begins to experiment to learn whether the plates are still hot. He gingerly touches the edges of the upper plate in two or three places. It seems safe to handle. He takes hold of upper and lower plates boldly, muttering, as he does so, "Cold as—." Drops the plates with a clatter and a smothered oath. Shakes his fingers and blows on them. Meanwhile MOLLIE is sitting very rigid, regarding BOB with a fixed stare and beating a vigorous tattoo on the tablecloth with her fingers. BOB catches her eye and cringes under her gaze. He drains and refills his glass. He studies the walls and the ceiling of the room, meanwhile still nursing his fingers. BOB steals a sidelong glance at MOLLIE. She is still staring at him. BOB turns his attention to the silverware and cutlery before him. He examines it critically, then lays a teaspoon carefully on the cloth before him, and attempts the trick of picking it up with the

*first finger in the bowl and the thumb at the point of the handle. After one or two attempts the spoon shoots on the floor, far behind him. MOLLIE jumps at the noise. BOB turns slowly and looks at the spoon with an injured air, then turns back to MOLLIE with a silly, vacuous smile. He now lays all the remaining cutlery in a straight row before him.]*

BOB. [*Slowly counting the cutlery and silver, back and forth.*] Eeny, meeny, miney, mo. Catch a— [*Stops suddenly as an idea comes to him. Gazes thoughtfully at MOLLIE, for a moment, then begins to count over again.*] Eeny, meeny, miney, mo; Hilda's talking to her beau. If we holler, she may go. Eeny, mee—

MOLLIE. [*Interrupting and exasperated to the verge of tears.*] Bob, if you don't stop all that nonsense, I shall scream! [*In a very tense tone.*] I believe I'm going to have one of my sick headaches! [*Puts her hand to her forehead.*] I know it; I can feel it coming on!

BOB. [*In a soothing tone.*] Hunger, my dear, hunger! When you have a good warm meal you'll feel better.

MOLLIE. [*In despair.*] What do you suppose I ought to do?

BOB. Go out in the kitchen and fry a couple of eggs.

MOLLIE. Oh! Be serious! I'm at my wits' end! Hilda never did anything like this before.

BOB. [*Suddenly quite serious.*] What does that fellow do for a living, anyhow?

MOLLIE. How should I know?

BOB. Didn't you ever ask Hilda?

MOLLIE. Certainly not. Hilda doesn't ask me about your practice; why should I pry into her affairs?

BOB. [*Taking out his cigarette case and lighting a cigarette.*] Mollie, I see you're strong for the Constitution of the United States.

MOLLIE. [*Suspiciously.*] What do you mean by that?

BOB. The Constitution says: "Whereas it is a self-evident truth that all men are born equal"— [*With a wave of the hand.*] Hilda and you, and the Terrible Swede and I and—

MOLLIE. [*Interrupting.*] Bob, you're such a heathen! That's not in the Constitution. That's in the Bible!

BOB. Well, wherever it is, until this evening I never realized what a personage Hilda is.

MOLLIE. You can make fun of me all you please, but I know what's right! Your remarks don't influence me in the least—not in the least!

BOB. [*Murmurs thoughtfully and feelingly.*] How true! [*Abruptly.*] Why don't they get married? Do you know that?

MOLLIE. All I know is that they are waiting until his business is entirely successful so that Hilda won't have to work.

BOB. Well, the Swedes are pretty careful of their money. The chances are Hilda has a good little nest egg laid by.

MOLLIE. [*Hesitating and doubtfully.*] That's one thing that worries me a little. I think Hilda puts money—into—into—into the young man's business.

BOB. [*Indignantly.*] Do you mean to tell me that this girl gives her money to that fellow and you don't try to find out a thing about him? Who he is or what he does? I suppose she supports the loafer.

MOLLIE. [*With dignity.*] He's not a loafer. I've seen him and I've talked with him and I know he's a gentleman.

BOB. Mollie, I'm getting tired of all that kind of drivel. I believe nowadays women give a good deal more thought to pleasing their maids than they do to pleasing their husbands.

MOLLIE. [*Demurely.*] Well, you know, Bob, your maid can leave you much easier than your husband can— [*Pauses thoughtfully.*] and I'm sure she's much harder to replace.

BOB. [*Very angry, looking at his watch, throwing his napkin on the table, and standing up.*] Mollie, our dinner has been interrupted for fifteen minutes while Hilda entertains her [*With sarcasm.*] gentleman friend. If you won't stop it, I will. [*Steps toward the door, center.*]

MOLLIE. [*Sternly, pointing to BOB's chair.*] Robert, sit down! [*BOB pauses, momentarily, and at the instant HILDA enters, cen-*

ter, meeting BOB face to face. Both are startled. BOB in a surly manner walks back to his place at the table. HILDA follows, excited and eager. BOB sits down and HILDA stands for a moment at the table, smiling from one to the other and evidently anxious to say something. BOB and MOLLIE are severe and unfriendly. They gaze at HILDA coldly. Slowly HILDA's enthusiasm cools and she becomes again the impassive servant.]

HILDA. Aixcuse me, Meeses Aispenhayne, I am very sorry. I bring the dinner right in. [HILDA exits left.]

BOB. It's all nonsense. [Touches the plates again, but this time even more cautiously than before. This time he finds they are entirely safe to handle.] These plates are stone cold now. [HILDA enters, left, with meat platter. Places it before BOB. He serves the meat and MOLLIE starts to serve the vegetables. HILDA hands MOLLIE her meat plate.]

MOLLIE. Vegetables? [BOB is chewing on his meat and does not answer. MOLLIE looks at him inquiringly. But his eyes are on his plate. Repeating.] Vegetables? [Still no answer from BOB. Very softly under her breath.] H'mm.

[MOLLIE helps herself to vegetables and then dishes out a portion which she hands to HILDA, who in turn places the dish beside BOB. When both are served, HILDA stands for a moment back of the table. She clasps and unclasps her hands in a nervous manner, seems about to speak, but as BOB and MOLLIE pay no attention to her she slowly and reluctantly turns and exits. MOLLIE takes one or two bites of the meat and then gives a quick glance at BOB. He is chewing desperately at his meat and MOLLIE quietly lays down her knife and fork and turns to the vegetables.]

BOB. [Savagely and biting hard on the meat.] When you meet Fanny Russell's building genius, you tell him that we will want a special telephone booth off the kitchen. While Hilda serves the dinner with one hand—

[BOB stops short, as HILDA bursts in abruptly, left, and comes to the table.]

HILDA. Aixcuse me, Meeses Aispenshayne, I am so excited.

MOLLIE. [*Anxiously.*] Is anything wrong, Hilda?

HILDA. [*Explosively.*] Meeses Aispenshayne, Meester Leendquist, he say you want to move to Highland Park!

[BOB and MOLLIE simultaneously drop their knives and forks and look at HILDA in astonishment and wonder.]

MOLLIE. What?

BOB. What?

HILDA. [*Repeats very rapidly.*] Meester Leendquist, he say you look for house on North Shore!

MOLLIE. [*Utterly overcome at Hilda's knowledge and at a loss for words of denial.*] We move to the North Shore? How ridiculous! Hilda, where did you get such an idea? [*Turns to BOB.*] Robert, did you ever hear anything so laughable? [*She forces a strained laugh.*] Ha! Ha! Ha! [BOB has been looking at HILDA in dumb wonder. At MOLLIE's question he turns to her in startled surprise. He starts to answer, gulps, swallows hard, and then coughs violently. Very sharply, after waiting a moment for BOB to answer.] Robert Espenshayne, will you stop that coughing and answer me?

BOB. [*Between coughs and drinking a glass of water.*] Egh! Egh! Excuse me! Something, eh! egh! stuck in my throat.

MOLLIE. [*Turning to HILDA.*] Some day we might want to move north, Hilda, but not now! Oh, no, not now!

BOB. Who told you that, Hilda?

HILDA. Meester Leendquist.

MOLLIE. [*Puzzled.*] Who is Mr. Lindquist?

HILDA. [*Surprised.*] Meester Leendquist— [*Pauses, a trifle embarrassed.*] Meester Leendquist ees young man who yust speak to me on telephone. He come to see me every Saturday.

BOB. Oh, Mr. Lindquist, the—the—Ter—

MOLLIE. [*Interrupting frantically and waving her hands at BOB.*] Yes, yes, of course. You know—Mr. Lindquist! [BOB catches himself just in time and MOLLIE settles back with a sigh of relief, then turns to HILDA with a puzzled air.] But where did Mr. Lind-

quist get such an idea?

HILDA. Meeses Russell tell heem so.

MOLLIE. [*Now entirely bewildered.*] What Mrs. Russell?

HILDA. Meeses Russell—your friend.

MOLLIE. [*More and more at sea.*] Mrs. Edwin Russell who comes to see me—every now and then?

HILDA. Yes.

MOLLIE. But how does Mrs. Russell know Mr. Lindquist, and why should she tell Mr. Lindquist that we expected to move to the North Shore?

HILDA. Meester Leendquist, he build Meeses Russell's house. That ees hees business. He build houses and sell them and rent them.

[BOB and MOLLIE look at each other and at HILDA in wonder and astonishment as the situation slowly filters into their brains. A long pause.]

BOB. [*In awe and astonishment.*] You mean that Mr. Lindquist, the young man who comes to see you every—every—every now and then—is the same man who put up the Russell house?

HILDA. Yes, Meester Aispenhayne.

BOB. [*Slowly.*] And when Mrs. Espenhayne [*Points to MOLLIE.*] wrote to Mrs. Russell [*Jerks his thumb to indicate the north.*], Mrs. Russell told Mr. Lindquist [*Jerks his thumb in opposite direction.*] and Mr. Lindquist telephoned to you? [*Points to HILDA.*]

HILDA. Yes, Meester Aispenhayne.

BOB. [*Very thoughtfully and slowly.*] H'mm! [*Then slowly resuming his meal and speaking in mock seriousness, in subtle jest at MOLLIE, and imitating her tone of a moment or two back.*] But, of course, you understand, Hilda, we don't want to move to the North Shore now! Oh, no, not now!

HILDA. [*Somewhat crestfallen.*] Yes, Meester Aispenhayne. [*Then more brightly and with growing enthusiasm.*] Yust now Meester Leendquist, he have carpenter contract for more barracks at Great Lakes. He yust came back from Miami. He do

work for Government there. Oh, Meester Aispenshayne, he build such beautiful houses, and so cheap. He do so much heemself. Hees father was carpenter and he work hees way through Uneevercity of Mennesota and study architecture and then he go to Uneevercity of Eelinois and study landscape gardening and now he been in business for heemself sex years. And oh, Meeses Aispenshayne, you must see hees own home! You will love eet, eet ees so beautiful. A little house, far back from the road. You can hardly see eet for the trees and the shrubs, and een the summer the roses grow all around eet. Eet is yust like the picture book!

MOLLIE. [*In the most perfunctory tone, utterly without interest or enthusiasm.*] How charming! [*Pauses thoughtfully, then turns to HILDA, anxiously.*] Then, I suppose, Hilda, if we should decide to move up to the North Shore you would go with us?

HILDA. [*Hesitatingly.*] Yes, Meeses Aispenshayne. [*Pauses.*] But I theenk I must tell you thees spring Meester Leendquist and I aixpect to get married. Meester Leendquist's business ees very good. He have a bad leg. The draft throw him out. [*With a quick smile and a glance from one to the other.*] You know, I am partner with heem. I put all my money een Meester Leendquist's business too.

[MOLLIE and BOB gaze at each other in complete resignation and surrender.]

BOB. [*Quite seriously, after a long pause.*] Hilda, I don't know whether we will move north or not, but the next time Mr. Lindquist comes here, I want you to introduce me to him. I'd like to know him. You ought to be very proud of a man like that.

HILDA. [*Radiant with pleasure.*] Thank you, Meester Aispenshayne.

MOLLIE. Yes, indeed, Hilda, Mr. Espenshayne has often said what a fine young man Mr. Lindquist seems to be. We want to meet him, and Mr. Espenshayne and I will talk about the house and then we will speak to Mr. Lindquist. [*Then weakly.*] Of course, we didn't expect to move north for a long time, but, of

course, if you expect to get married, and Mr. Lindquist builds houses— [*Her voice dies out. Long pause.*]

HILDA. Thank you, Meeses Aispenshayne, I will tell Mr. Leendquist. [*HILDA stands at the table a moment longer, then slowly turns and moves toward door, left. BOB and MOLLIE watch her and as she moves away from the table BOB turns to MOLLIE. At this moment HILDA stops, turns suddenly and returns to the table.*] Oh, Meeses Aispenshayne, I forget one theeng!

MOLLIE. What now, Hilda?

HILDA. Meester Leendquist say if you like to look at property or houses now, I let heem know and he will drive you around.

BOB. That's fine, but you know we can't build now. We wouldn't want to use Mr. Lindquist's gas that way.

HILDA. Gas? Oh, he have all the gas he want. He have the T card.

CURTAIN



# JOHNNY'S LITTLE LAMB

By

WELDON STONE

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# JOHNNY'S LITTLE LAMB

## CHARACTERS

JOHNNY JONES, *a Future Farmer of America*

JAY JONES, *his father, a tenant farmer*

EBBY JONES, *his mother*

CYRUS JAMISON, *banker and the JONESES' landlord*

MARY JAMISON, *his daughter, who gave JOHNNY his little lamb*

NICK THE GREEK } *feuding hot-dog vendors*

TONY THE ITALIAN }

JOE, TONY'S SON } *who get married to settle their fathers'*

HELEN, NICK'S DAUGHTER } *feud*

BOY and GIRL }

ANOTHER BOY and GIRL } *passersby, friends of JOHNNY and MARY*

THE BAND, *a half dozen or more boys and girls playing any  
assortment of instruments just any old way*

TIME: The present.

PLACE: Midland County Fair, any state, U.S.A.

## JOHNNY'S LITTLE LAMB

*The scene is The Midway, before two hot-dog stands.*

*The two booths are identical in every way, even to the patriotic bunting draped about them, and they are built jam-up against each other. The entry-way to each is a portion of the counter which lifts up. The booth on the right is TONY's, the other is NICK's. There is a pine-board table with benches before each booth.*

*At the rise of the curtain TONY and NICK are in their booths leaning over their counters in identical positions. Each has a beautiful and identical black eye. They alternately glare at each other and watch a lone customer sitting at TONY's table. This customer is JOHNNY JONES, a tall country-type boy of high school age who looks just now as if he didn't have a friend in the world. He is glumly but rapidly finishing a hot-dog when TONY speaks.*

TONY. You like-a the hot-dog, huh? Is pretty good? But—you eat too quick, [*With a dirty glance at NICK.*] like a starving Greek. Have another one?

JOHNNY. [*Just a negative grunt, as he takes the last bite of his hot-dog and stands up.*] —got time. [*He starts off left, but stops to count his money. He has four nickels, and he drops them one by one into the palm of his hand. Then he turns and comes back, but stops at NICK's stand.*] Gimme another hot-dog.

NICK. Sure! Sure! This time—a good one!

JOHNNY. What was wrong with the other one?

NICK. [*Jerking his thumb toward TONY's.*] Wrong place, bad dog! Now you find the right place for good dog.

TONY. [*Leaning out of his booth.*] He's a big lie. This right place. This the place you buy before. His dog [*Jerking thumb toward NICK.*] bite the hand what's eating them!

JOHNNY. Oh! [*He takes the hot-dog NICK is holding out, pays for it.*] I don't care. Anything's good enough for me. Too good. [*He sits at NICK's table and gloomily munches his hot-dog.*]

TONY. [*Warning JOHNNY.*] I'm-a telling you. You gonna catch a pain-in-the-side-us.

NICK. [*Contemptuously, jerking a thumb again.*] He don't speak English much.

TONY. [*Thumb jerking.*] He don't speak nothings—just lies.

NICK. I don't speak nothing to him. He's a little Mussolini—a snake in the back.

[*As TONY is about to reply—to JOHNNY, of course—a BOY and GIRL enter left.*]

BOY and GIRL. [*Together.*] Hi, Johnny.

[*JOHNNY looks up, grunts.*]

BOY. Whatcha doing?

JOHNNY. Eating a hot-dog.

[*GIRL titters.*]

GIRL. Oh, Johnny! You're so funny.

JOHNNY. [*Morosely.*] You don't have to tell me.

BOY. Aw, come on, Johnny. Let's have some fun. We're gonna do things—ride the ferris-wheel and roller-coaster and everything. Wanna go with us?

JOHNNY. Naw.

BOY. What'sa matter?

JOHNNY. Nothing. I just don't want to ride nothing.

BOY. Well, be seeing you.

GIRL. So long, Johnny.

JOHNNY. Good-bye.

[*The BOY and GIRL go off right whispering.*]

TONY. What'sa mat'? You got a pain so quick? You want a doctor?

JOHNNY. Naw.

NICK. [*Thumb jerk.*] He's got to ba-a-a-a! like a sheep at nobody's business.

[*JOHNNY perks up, looks at NICK with interest.*]

JOHNNY. Whose sheep?

NICK. Everybody's, anybody's—nobody's! Just a sheep—just a big noise—and a bad smell.

JOHNNY. Oh.

TONY. [*Furious, starts out of his booth.*] Nick, I'll black you' eye some more.

NICK. I'll black your neck.

TONY. [*Calms down, speaks to JOHNNY.*] No—I wash my mouth. [*He lifts a glass of water, takes a big mouthful, expels it contemptuously.*] I don't speak to him—never no more. You want a hot-dog now—a good one?

JOHNNY. [*Rising, pulling his money out of his pocket and looking at it.*] I don't care if I do. [*He goes to TONY's booth.*]

NICK. So—I tell you! He's a robber. He steals a custom' under my nose.

[*As JOHNNY is getting his hot-dog from TONY, another BOY and GIRL enter from right.*]

GIRL. [*Delighted.*] Johnny! We've been looking for you.

BOY. Yeah. We're going to the dance. Wanna go?

JOHNNY. Naw.

GIRL. You'll be sorry. *Somebody's* going to be there, I betcha. You know—somebody *important*.

BOY. Better come go, Johnny. She'll be looking for you.

JOHNNY. [*Miserably.*] Thanks. But—I don't want to. I just don't feel like dancing—even if I could.

BOY. Well, so long.

GIRL. Be seeing you, Johnny.

JOHNNY. [*Glumly.*] Yeah—maybe. [*He goes to TONY's table.*]

TONY. Hey, friend—Johnny? You' name Johnny?

JOHNNY. Yeah.

TONY. [*Earnestly.*] What'sa mat'? You don't look so happy.

JOHNNY. I ain't.

TONY. What'sa mat'?

JOHNNY. Nothing. I'm—just a sap.

NICK. That's all right, Johnny. That's your business.

TONY. Don'ta pay him no mind—no moneys either! Tell Tony you' troubles. I'm you' friend—everybody's friend but just one big wop.

NICK. [*Starting out of his booth, furious.*] I'll break one dago neck! No. I wash my hands. [*He proceeds to do so, thoroughly but without water, rubbing his dry hands together till his next speech.*]

TONY. Come on, Johnny. What's you' mind on? You gotta girl-trouble? I got a fine boy just like you. He's alla time got girl-trouble.

NICK. He brags like a donkey. [*He imitates a braying donkey.*] Me—I got a fine girl—and she don't speak to his fine boy that wants to marry her. She's got good sense—same like me. [*He washes his hands some more.*]

TONY. My boy Joe—he's got the good sense. He wouldn't marry her for a gift!

JOHNNY. [*Loosening up a little.*] I wish I had some good sense—just a little bit. That's my trouble. I just haven't got any sense. I ought to stay at home.

TONY. [*Comfortingly.*] That's all right, Johnny. Everybody can be a fool some-a time, but nobody can be a fool all-a-time—nobody but [*Thumb jerk.*] him!

NICK. I don't listen.

JOHNNY. Nobody's bad off as I am. I come to the Fair with all the money I got—two dollars and a quarter—and you know what I done with it?

TONY. You eat some hot dogs, huh? So many?

NICK. Just one of his—too many!

JOHNNY. It's worse'n that. I give it away. To that crook that runs the place where you try to throw balls into wooden tubs. It's a racket. He's got it fixed so the balls bounce out. I should've known better. I'm just a sucker—a hick from the country.

TONY. You spend all you' money there?

JOHNNY. All but two bits.

NICK. [*Getting interested.*] You spend two dollars?

JOHNNY. Naw, I didn't spend it. I gave it away. Two dollars! And Pa loaned 'em to me. And he didn't have 'em to spare.

TONY. But what you want, Johnny? A dolly maybe?

JOHNNY. [*Surprised.*] Yeah. How'd you know?

TONY. I know, Johnny. Joe—he's a fine boy just like you—but he's alla time got girl-trouble.

NICK. My girl Helen—if she wants a doll, I buy her one for half a dollar Sears Roebuck.

JOHNNY. Sure 'nough? Just half a dollar?

NICK. Sure. I use my head.

TONY. Don't feel bad, Johnny. He's tell a lie once more—like always when he talks. Come on, eat another hot-dog—just be happy!

JOHNNY. [*Miserably.*] No. I gotta feel bad. There ain't no other way to feel. That two dollars was for something special, and now it's gone and I can't do it. I can't do anything I ever wanted to. You see, I'm an F.F.A.—that means I'm a Future Farmer of America—and I've got a little lamb, her name is Sarah Jane—and she's the prettiest little lamb y'ever laid eyes on—and I was going to enter her in the show tomorrow and win a prize. But it costs two dollars to enter, so now I can't. And Mary—that's a girl I know—Mary Jamison—well, she's going to be awful disappointed.

TONY. Ah, you mean the rich-a man? The banker? Mary, she's his daughter, huh?

NICK. He's a farmer, too. He's got plenty land, plenty fine stocks cattle.

JOHNNY. Sure. Everybody knows Mister Jamison. He's our landlord. We live on one of his farms and work it for him on shares.

TONY. So this Mary, this girl you know—?

JOHNNY. She gave me this little lamb when it wasn't any bigger than a kitten. And I took good care of it, like we learn to do in Future Farmers, and she's the finest little lamb there ever was—but now—oh there ain't no use in talking about it.

NICK. That's right. Mr. Jamison, he wins all the prizes all the time. You can't win, so you don't lose nothing, Johnny.

JOHNNY. You just don't know. I've lost everything. Sarah Jane would've won. She's better looking than anything Mr. Jamison ever had to show.

TONY. Except, maybe, his fine girl Mary? So, Johnny?

JOHNNY. What?

TONY. You like her, no? This Mary who had a little lamb what she give to you?

JOHNNY. [*Rising.*] She won't ever speak to me again—not now. [*He goes to NICK's booth.*] Gimme another hot-dog. I got a dime left. Might as well blow it in too.

TONY. Count you' change good, Johnny.

NICK. Don't listen. This one on the house.

JOHNNY. What?

NICK. I give you this one—free for nothing.

[*MARY and CYRUS enter left.*]

JOHNNY. [*Insulted.*] Oh, no, you don't. I may be a sucker, but I ain't no beggar. And I never will be.

[*He shoves the nickel emphatically toward NICK and turns to table as MARY and her father are crossing to right.*]

MARY. Johnny! Where *have* you been? I've looked all over.

CYRUS. Hello, Johnny. Having a big time?

JOHNNY. Oh! No. Yes, sir, I mean.

CYRUS. That's good. Mary says you're going to enter that lamb of yours in the show tomorrow. It'll have to be perfect, Johnny—a miracle.

JOHNNY. Yes, sir. I—guess it will.

MARY. I'm gonna wait for you here, Dad. I want to talk to Johnny.

CYRUS. Sure. Better rest, have a hot-dog or something. I won't be long. Just going down to look 'em over, Johnny, see what my competition looks like.

[*He goes out right. MARY comes to JOHNNY, who is still standing by NICK's table, hot-dog in hand.*]

MARY. [*As JOHNNY stares at his hot-dog.*] Well, Johnny, aren't you going to buy me a hot-dog?

TONY and NICK. [*Together.*] Coming up—right away!

JOHNNY. [*Feeling frantically in his pocket for his last nickel.*] Oh, sure. Of course. I didn't know you ate 'em.

MARY. And why not?

JOHNNY. Well, I just thought maybe you wouldn't. You know, hot-dogs are—well, just for common folks.

[TONY rushes out just ahead of NICK with MARY's hot dog on a paper plate, which he planks down firmly on his table. TONY tactfully accepts JOHNNY's last nickel and glares at NICK. They return to their booths.]

MARY. That's a crazy thing to say, Johnny. Everybody likes hot-dogs. Let's sit down. My doggies are tired.

[*She sits at TONY's table.*]

JOHNNY. [*Hesitant, flustered.*] Well, I bought mine from Nick. Guess I ought to sit at his table. They're sort've—you know, I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings. [*He sits down at NICK's table, and MARY, about to take a bite of her hot-dog, is so surprised she stops with open mouth.*]

MARY. What's the matter?

JOHNNY. [*With irritation cropping up out of his misery.*] Nothing's the matter. What's everybody asking me what's the matter for? Do I look like something's the matter?

MARY. Yes. You certainly do. What is it?

JOHNNY. Nothing, I tell you. I'm—just a fool.

[TONY and NICK have been making frantic gestures meaning 'push 'em up, get together.' MARY sees and understands. She gets up from TONY's table and goes to NICK's.]

MARY. Move over, Johnny. Company's coming. [JOHNNY slides down the bench in glum delight and MARY sits beside him. As she begins eating her hot-dog.] Now tell me about it. I won't say a word.

JOHNNY. [*Bitter as quinine.*] I know you won't. That's the trouble. [*Pause, while JOHNNY waits for her reply, stealing a side-*

wise glance to see what she's looking like. She's chewing healthily on a big mouthful of hot-dog, and she's got a little mustard on her mouth, but otherwise she looks OK—calm, collected, and patient. She just keeps eating and waiting, and JOHNNY has to go on.] I mean—you won't ever speak to me again. Not after I tell you.

MARY. Try me and see.

JOHNNY. [*Suddenly determined to tell all—or nearly all.*] All right. I will. I can't enter Sarah Jane in the show tomorrow. And it's all my fault.

MARY. [*After another open-mouthed pause, but still calm.*] How so?

JOHNNY. The fee is two dollars, and I haven't got two dollars.

MARY. Well I have!

[*She starts to open her purse, and that's too much for JOHNNY. He's the son of a tenant farmer, and he's proud. Touched to the quick, he tries to cover up his hurt with a show of anger.*]

JOHNNY. Oh, no, you won't! You keep out of this. You gave me the lamb in the first place, and you needn't think you can buy her back with your old man's money. Or anybody's money, you hear?

MARY. [*After carefully wiping the mustard from her lips.*] I wouldn't want to buy her back, Johnny. [*He doesn't answer, just stares glumly before him, with a feeling of shame sharpening his misery. She opens her compact, applies lipstick. Finished, she faces him squarely.*] How do you like it, Johnny?

JOHNNY. [*Staring at her blankly.*] What—mustard?

MARY. No. My lipstick. It's a new kind.

JOHNNY. [*Staring now at her lips, slowly, a little awed.*] Oh. It's—all right—I guess.

MARY. It tastes good.

JOHNNY. You mean—that stuff?

MARY. Uh-huh. After hot-dogs especially.

JOHNNY. Oh. [*He looks away, glummer, if possible, than ever.*]

MARY. [*With cunning female cruelty, for JOHNNY, she thinks,*

*needs a jolting.*] Johnny, I'll give you a bright new penny for your thoughts.

JOHNNY. [*Bitterly.*] Yeah? And if I had two hundred of 'em, you'd give me two dollars, I guess. Well, I never had two hundred thoughts—or even one—in all my life.

MARY. [*With an abrupt change of tactics, she jerks his arm, forcing him to face her.*] Now you look here, Johnny Jones. You're an F.F.A. and I'm a Four-H Club member in good standing. You're supposed to have something to believe in and work for— [*With a little contempt.*] you Future Farmers of America—and so do we—us Four-H's. We believe in our heads, our hands, our hearts, and our home—and we believe in using the first three to make the last. Now what's a Future Farmer believe in—quitting every time it thunders?

JOHNNY. [*Stiffly upright, but not looking at her.*] No! We don't believe in quitting—not ever. But sometimes it looks like you just gotta, that's all.

MARY. Why? You haven't told me why, Johnny. It can't be just the two dollars. You can get two dollars just anywhere. The Club will lend it to you—I'll make 'em—and you can pay us back out of the prize money. Sarah Jane's bound to win, Johnny. I just know she will. I've got a hunch. Dad's scared stiff, and he hasn't even seen her yet. Come on, Johnny. Tell little Mary all your troubles. That's what little Marys are for all over the world. Mama said so. Listen, Johnny, this little Mary's gonna say something:

“Mary had a little lamb,  
Its fleece was white as snow;  
And everywhere that Mary went—”

Go on, Johnny. You take it from there.

JOHNNY. [*Trying hard.*] “That lamb—”  
[*His voice breaks all to pieces on the hard hickory-knot lodged in his throat. He jumps up, looking for a hiding place in which to cry his eyes out like a sissy. MARY rises. NICK and TONY with outstretched hands plead silently with him not to run away.*

*And at this worst of all possible moments, of course, CYRUS reappears at right.]*

CYRUS. Well, Mary, let's go home. I've seen some bad news, and I want to sleep it off. But Johnny, I guess, would call it good news.

MARY. I know! You mean Sarah Jane.

CYRUS. Yes, I saw Sarah Jane, and in my judgment, she's a dead-sure winner—the best of the lot. You've got a good eye, Mary, and Johnny's got a good head. Sometime I want you to tell me how you did it, Johnny. I thought I knew it all, but you've got me beat this time sure. Guess I'd better start back to school again, and try to be a Future Farmer instead of an old mossback bungler.

JOHNNY. [*With great dignity.*] You needn't worry, Mr. Jami-son. I've decided not to enter Sarah Jane.

MARY. Johnny!

CYRUS. Not enter her! Why, you can't afford not to, Johnny. Of course, the prize isn't much, but you'll get to sell at auction to the highest bidder. No telling how much she'll bring you.

JOHNNY. I wouldn't sell her.

CYRUS. Now, Johnny, that's not good business. Of course, I know how it is. You get attached to an animal—lambs especially—when you mother 'em along like that. But you know, Johnny, you can't afford not to take a profit when it comes along. That's just good business.

JOHNNY. [*His pride speaking.*] I can afford it—even if it's bad business.

CYRUS. But, Johnny, what'll your dad say?

JOHNNY. [*About to catch on fire.*] I know Dad owes you money, and how much. But he'll pay it back, don't worry.

CYRUS. Of course he will, Johnny. That's beside the point.

JOHNNY. No, it's not either. If I sold Sarah Jane at auction, we might get enough to pay you off. But—I'm just not going to enter her, and she's not for sale.

CYRUS. But why, Johnny?

JOHNNY. I just decided—

TONY and NICK. [*Together, pleading with him to tell the truth.*] Johnny!

TONY. Remember George-a Washington!

NICK. He's the father of your country.

TONY. And he's never tell a lie!

CYRUS. What's all this? Who's telling a lie?

TONY. [*Trying to explain.*] Johnny, he's—

CYRUS. Why, Johnny!

TONY. No, no. He's not tell a lie. But—he's have bad luck, Mister Jamison.

JOHNNY. [*Furious.*] You keep out of this.

TONY. Please!

NICK. Let him talk, Johnny. He's got a big mouth—like Mussolini.

TONY. I no can stop, Johnny. Mr. Jamison, you gotta coupla dollars in the bank. Well, Johnny, he ain't. He's been robbed [*Jerks thumb toward NICK.*] by him, so he's broke like a camel's back. He no can push his little lamb Mary Jane for the show.

CYRUS. [*Reaching for his wallet.*] Why, Johnny, why didn't you tell me? Of course, it's a little like pulling an eye-tooth for me, because I'd have a chance to win with you out of the running—but this is America, Johnny, and America's the place where every man's lamb's got an equal chance with every other man's. I'd never be able to look myself in the face again if Sarah Jane was missing from that show tomorrow. [*He offers two one-dollar bills.*] Here you are, Johnny. Pay me back if you win, and if you don't, just charge it off to my bad judgment.

MARY. [*Dismayed at his lack of tact.*] Dad!

JOHNNY. [*Pale and trembling.*] I wouldn't touch that money, Mr. Jamison. Thank you just the same. [*He turns abruptly and goes off left.*]

CYRUS. Well, what do you know about that? [*He looks at MARY.*] What've I done to—?

[*NICK and TONY look at each other, confer by gestures and gri-*

*maces without words.]*

MARY. Oh, Dad, won't you ever learn anything? You hurt Johnny's pride, and it was already hurt. Now it's hopeless.

TONY. No! Wait!

*[He and NICK come rushing out of their booths.]*

NICK. I been thinking.

TONY. No! He's a lie. *I* been thinking.

NICK. *I* have!

CYRUS. So have I! Here, take this and go get him. Tell 'im it's yours. Tell 'im you want to loan it to him—with interest.

TONY. Sure, ten per cents!

*[Both reach for money, stop and glare.]*

NICK. It's my think! I go.

TONY. *I'm*-a going.

MARY. Both of you go.

CYRUS. That's it—both of you. Give 'im a dollar each. *[He hands each a dollar.]*

TONY. OK. Sure. You watch the boot', sell the dogs?

MARY. Yes. We'll watch 'em both.

NICK. That's fine.

MARY. Hurry!

NICK and TONY. *[Together, snatching off their aprons and chef's caps, throwing them onto the booth counters.]* Sure. We'll run. *[They do so, out left, neck-and-neck.]*

MARY. *[Grabbing her father's hand, dragging him toward booths.]* Come on, Dad. We've got us a job. I've always wanted to sell hot-dogs.

CYRUS. But—we don't have to go inside, do we?

MARY. *[Shoving him into TONY's booth.]* Sure we do. You can't sell hot-dogs from the outside looking in.

CYRUS. Well, I just hope we don't get caught.

MARY. *[Putting on NICK's apron and cap.]* We're not gonna play the market, Dad—or the horses. We're just gonna sell hot-dogs. Put on Tony's apron—cap, too. We've got to do right by 'em.

CYRUS. [*Obeying.*] Oh, well. Nobody'll know me in this garb—that's certain.

MARY. What if they do? This is America, isn't it? [*She calls out for customers.*] Hey! Look! Right this way, folks! Come get your hot-dogs. They're hot and juicy, not a bark in a carload.

CYRUS. Sh-h-h-h! Somebody'll hear you.

MARY. What do you think I'm yelling for? Betcha I sell one before you do—five dollars!

CYRUS. [*Rising to the challenge—and the chance to turn a neat quick profit.*] Don't be a piker. I'll raise you five.

MARY. It's a bet!

CYRUS. [*Bellowing.*] All right, folks! Here you are! The chance of a life-time! Two-in-one hot-dogs—both for a nickel—worth a dime. Get 'em while they're hot, get 'em while they last—and twice your money back if you don't like 'em.

[*JAY and EBBY JONES enter right. They look like what they are: tenant farmers who got off to a slow start, never quite got ahead.*]

MARY. Dad! That's not fair. You're cutting prices.

CYRUS. Uncle Sam says it's more blessed to cut 'em than to inflate 'em.

[*JAY and EBBY have approached his booth.*]

JAY. Give us a couple o' pairs o' them bargain hot-dogs. [*He turns to EBBY.*] You can eat both barrels, cain't ye, Ma?

[*CYRUS has, of course, recognized them and is having a little trouble preparing their orders. MARY is enjoying his swivet immensely.*]

EBBY. Why shore I can. I ain't ailin'.

JAY. Nor me. Plenty o' mustard on 'em, feller, and don't spare yore dogs. [*He digs EBBY in the ribs.*] Purty good'n, wasn't it, Ebby?

EBBY. Shucks, Jay, you're giddy as one o' them hobby-horses. We'd best go home after this.

JAY. Th' ain't no rush about it. The Fair don't come but oncet a year. I'm havin' me a time.

EBBY. So am I, but jest the same, we'd best be lookin' for

Johnny. It's agittin' late.

CYRUS. Well, folks, here you are. [EBBY takes her hot-dog and recognizes CYRUS. JAY is looking for two nickels in his coin-purse, while CYRUS holds his hot-dog. When JAY pays, he recognizes CYRUS. He stares, money in hand. CYRUS affects an Italian accent.] What's a mat'?

JAY. [In a dither, trying to decide which to believe, his eyes or his ears—or neither.] You mean, what's the matter with me?

CYRUS. Sure. What's a matta with you? You seeek? You feel-a bad? You see a ghost, maybe?

[EBBY, who has caught sight of MARY, pokes JAY in the ribs with her elbow.]

JAY. [Ignoring her, still staring at CYRUS, not taken in, not quite sure of himself.] Yeah, I reckon that's it—jest a ghost. But I shore hadn't heared the news.

[He hands CYRUS the money and takes his hot-dog. Then he sees MARY, who is about to explode with laughter.]

CYRUS. What-a news? Stock-a-market go up, maybe?

JAY. [He gestures with his hot-dog.] Why, this here—you and yore daughter turned into ghosties and sellin' hot-dogs fer a livin'.

MARY. Maybe Dad's a ghost, but I'm not. How about it, Dad? If you are, you can't collect that ten bucks I owe you.

CYRUS. [Speaking naturally.] No, Jay, we're not ghosts—not yet. We're just pinch-hitting for a couple of good eggs.

MARY. Nick the Greek and Tony the Italian. They went to see somebody about a lamb.

JAY. A lamb?

MARY. Uh-huh. Johnny. He was here a while ago, and he's coming back.

EBBY. Well, I'm glad to hear that. We ain't seen hide nor hair of 'im since sundown.

CYRUS. Don't worry, Mrs. Jones, Johnny's all right. Just sit down and rest yourself.

JAY. [Lowering his voice, as EBBY sits at TONY's table.] He

ain't been up to no mischief, has he?

CYRUS. Johnny? Oh, no. He's just a little worried about that lamb of his. But not half as much as I am.

JAY. That Sary Jane—she's a ring-tail tooter, ain't she?

CYRUS. She's one in a thousand, Jay—or two thousand.

JAY. Well, she was one of yore stock to begin with. That orter make ye feel good.

CYRUS. Sure, it does. Johnny just outsmarted me in raising her, that's all. What's he been feeding her?

JAY. You'll have to ask Johnny about that. But I can tell ye one thing: he's shore been learnin' some tricks. You know what he is? He's a Future Farmer of America. Yessir, that's what they call themselves.

CYRUS. Well, I'm sure Johnny's got a right to. You ought to be proud of him, Jay.

JAY. [*Shaking his head.*] Not no more'n we are. 'Tain't good for a body to have such a stiff neck he cain't see the earth he walks on.

CYRUS. I guess you're right, Jay. But there's one thing we've all got a right to be proud of in these times: we live in a country where they don't put you in jail for it—being proud, I mean.

JAY. That's a fact. I ain't seen the inside of a calaboose yet.

EBBY. You'd best be knockin' on wood—or lightin' a shuck for home.

[TONY and NICK enter left. With gestures indicating failure, they go over to CYRUS.]

NICK. [*Returning the dollar.*] No soap.

TONY. [*Returning his dollar.*] No thanks.

CYRUS. You mean—?

MARY. He wouldn't take it?

TONY. No do.

NICK. [*Holding his nose in disdain.*] No touch.

TONY. He says it'sa you' money.

NICK. He says, "Put it in the bank, let it grow up and get a big window." [*His gestures draw the outline of a "bay window."*]

TONY. That Johnny, he's a too smart for his britches.

JAY. [*A little belligerently.*] What's that you're sayin' about Johnny?

TONY. This fine boy Johnny. He's OK, but—he's got a stiff neck like a mule.

JAY. [*Moving toward TONY.*] Now you looky here! I ain't agoin' to hear nobody say a thing like that but me—Jay Jones hisself!

EBBY. Now, Jay, ca'm yourself.

CYRUS. Yes. Hold on, Jay. Let me explain. You see—

JOHNNY. [*Entering hurriedly from left.*] Wait a minute, Mister Jamison. I'd rather—do my own explaining. [*Turns to JAY.*] I lost that two dollars, Pa. I—just threw it away—blew it in—for nothing. [*He swallows hard and steals a glance at MARY.*] So then—well, I couldn't enter Sarah Jane in the show, but Mr. Jamison— [*He turns to him.*] Mister Jamison, if you're still willing, and if you think my credit's any good, I'd sure like to borrow that two dollars at eight per cent interest—

MARY. Oh, Johnny!

JOHNNY. But—just for one day!

CYRUS. [*A little flabbergasted.*] Why sure, Johnny, but—

JOHNNY. I mean if Sarah Jane wins. If she don't—well, I reckon you better make it thirty days—or maybe ninety. And I want it in writing, like a note.

CYRUS. All right, Johnny. It's a deal. [*Handing him the two dollars.*] You come by the bank in the morning and I'll have the note made out for you. All right?

JOHNNY. [*Husky.*] Yes, sir. And—I thank you a lot, Mister Jamison, and I'm awful sorry I acted that way. It wasn't right—not for a Future Farmer of America.

MARY. [*Almost breathless.*] Oh, Johnny!

CYRUS. That's all right, Johnny. I know how you feel.

JOHNNY. [*Very humbly.*] I feel ashamed.

JAY. Well, I'll jest be danged!

EBBY. And so will I! What did ye say ye did with that two dollars—!

JAY. [*Hastily.*] Now, Ebby—

JOHNNY. [*Blurring it out.*] I gambled it away! [*After a hasty glance at MARY.*] Trying to win a Kewpie doll!

EBBY. Why, Johnny! If ye'd jest let me know ye wanted one, I could've made it fer ye in two shakes of Sarah Jane's tail!

MARY. [*Delighted.*] Oh, would you, Mrs. Jones? Would you make one? For Johnny, I mean.

EBBY. Why shore I will. Tomorrow, if Johnny still hankers fer it.

JOHNNY. [*Embarrassed, stealing another glance at MARY.*] If ye have time, I wish ye would, Ma. I—want it for something special. I want to give it to somebody—somebody I—

EBBY. Now, now, you don't need to mention no names. I'll make it a pretty one—a sight prettier any of them store-boughten things.

MARY. I'll bet!

JOHNNY. Thank ye, Ma.

EBBY. Well, Jay, are we goin' to stay the night?

JAY. Wouldn't care if we did. But it'll be a big day tomorrow, so maybe we'd best be adraggin'— [*He hears Band off left playing the Wedding March in swingtime, stops to listen.*] Now what's that acomin'?

[*As all wait expectantly, TONY's fine boy JOE and NICK's fine girl HELEN enter left. They're just married: JOE wears a sandwich placard saying so, also a pair of old shoes around his neck; HELEN's dark hair glistens with rice. The Band is obviously impromptu: boys and girls, mainly Italians and Greeks, with a haphazard medley of instruments played with individual frenzy. JOE and HELEN stop near center; together TONY and NICK storm out to meet them.*]

TONY. [*Shouting, silencing the Band.*] Giovanni!

NICK. Helen!

TONY. What you did?

NICK. It's not so!

JOE. Now, Pa, keep your shirt on.

HELEN. You too, Pa. It's too late to stop us.

JOE. We're married.

HELEN. And it's all your fault.

JOE. Yes. We didn't mean to do it—

HELEN. Why, Joe! We certainly did!

JOE. Right now, I mean.

HELEN. Oh.

TONY. Stop!

NICK. Keep talking—so I won't say something.

JOE. Well, we think the war's in Europe—not over here.

HELEN. We hate quarrels and fighting and we're not ever going to have any.

JOE. So we thought maybe if we went ahead and got married now, you old fools might forget there's a war going on, and make up and be friends again like old times.

NICK. Who's an old fool?

HELEN. You are—and him!

[TONY and NICK look at each other.]

TONY. You—and me! Old fools, huh?

NICK. [*Nodding with sly good humor.*] You hear good—you old fool!

TONY. [*Boisterous.*] Oh, well, what's the diff? Once upon a time, I had just a fine boy. Now—take a look—I gotta fine girl too. [*Quickly, he kisses HELEN, turns and offers his hand to NICK.*] OK, Nick?

NICK. [*Taking his hand.*] OK, Tony. Me—I got a fine boy, too.

TONY. We bury the by-gones?

NICK. [*Nodding.*] For good!

[*They hug each other.*]

EBBY. Now ain't that just too sweet?

JAY. It shore is. They orter be ashamed of theirselves—grown men actin' like that right here in America.

CYRUS. No. It's a good sign, Jay. It couldn't happen nowadays any place but America.

TONY. All right, everybody! We have a big celebrash—a big

feed for everybody—plenty hot-dogs free for nothing? OK, Nick?  
[*The Band ad libs Hooray! etc.*]

NICK. OK, Tony.

MARY. Oh, Tony, that's a grand idea! We'll help you—won't we, Dad?

CYRUS. [*Hesitantly.*] Why sure—that is, if they want us—

MARY. All right, Tony. You and Nick fix 'em up. Dad and I will serve 'em.

TONY. That's-a fine—swell!

NICK. Sure. You gotta job.

[TONY and NICK enter their booths and start working frantically. JOHNNY sidles over to MARY. JOE and HELEN sit at table, hold hands, whisper. JAY and EBBY watch JOHNNY and MARY, nudge each other. CYRUS goes to TONY's counter to get hot-dogs he is preparing. The Band confers in whispers about what they ought to play next.]

JOHNNY. Whatcha want me to do, Mary?

MARY. You, Johnny? What do I want you to do?

JOHNNY. Uh-huh—me.

MARY. Three guesses.

JOHNNY. Help you?

MARY. Uh-huh.

JOHNNY. All right—but how?

MARY. "Mary had a little lamb—" [*She goes to NICK's booth while JOHNNY thinks.*]

JOHNNY. [*As she places paper plates with hot-dogs before the bride and groom.*] "Its fleece was white as snow—"

MARY. And everywhere that lambkin went—?

[*She goes back to NICK's booth. JOHNNY thinks. CYRUS brings hot-dogs to JAY and EBBY.*]

CYRUS. Here you are, folks—sizzling hot.

JAY. Well, I'll be dogged!

EBBY. And so will I! You awaitin' on us!

CYRUS. [*With a waiter's bow and manner.*] Just an old American custom, ma'm. It's a privilege and an honor. [*He returns*

to TONY's booth for more hot-dogs.]

JOHNNY. [*As MARY returns with two more plates.*]

"And everywhere that lambkin went"

That girl was sure to go.

MARY. [*With a slow smile.*] Do you like mustard?

JOHNNY. Do you?

MARY. Yes. Gobs!

JOHNNY. So do I.

[*As the Band strikes up Yankee Doodle, MARY puts one plate down on the table and offers the other to JOHNNY. He takes her hand and holds onto it and the plate. They look at the bride and groom, and the bride and groom look at them. But as the Curtain falls MARY and JOHNNY are looking at each other over the hot-dog plate, and JOHNNY is still holding onto her hand.*]

CURTAIN

# THE REFUGEE

by

DORCAS HARVEY

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# THE REFUGEE

## CHARACTERS

JUNIE CATLIN, *switchboard operator*

STUYVESANT MUNN }

PAUL HAUSER } *tenants*

MISS WELKE }

MR. WHETTERN, *a plainclothesman*

MR. WILKINS, *the manager*

A REFUGEE

A VOICE

TIME: Around five thirty in the afternoon.

SCENE: The outer office of an apartment house, the George Washington Arms.

## THE REFUGEE

SCENE: *The office of the George Washington Arms, an old-fashioned apartment house in an average American city.*

*The switchboard stands right of center. Angling off from it are pigeonholes holding the tenants' mail. A chair or two and an elderly hat-tree stand against the wall. A folded newspaper lies on one of the chairs. The atmosphere is one of flyspecked gentility. A door right leads from the lobby; one left to the manager's office.*

*As the curtain rises, JUNIE CATLIN, the switchboard operator, is talking over the phone. It is around half past five in the afternoon.*

JUNIE. I told him, I said it wasn't our fault if the lights went off. [*There is a flash at the board.*] Hold on, wait a minute. . . . [*Singsong.*] George Washington Arms at your service. . . . Mrs. Schuster? Just hold the wire. . . . [*She plugs in the call and returns to her private conversation.*] Everybody thought it was a blackout, but it wasn't. What Mr. Munn said I can't repeat. . . . Yeah, plenty. . . . It's on account of the baby: should of come two weeks ago. . . . Her first and she's forty-three if she's a day; no wonder he's worried. [*Another flash.*] Don't hang up, I got a call. . . . George Washington Arms at your service. . . . Miss Maggie Sothern? I'll see. . . . [*She plugs in.*] Listen, I got plenty to tell you when I see you. [*In a guarded voice.*] We got a Nazi . . . a Nazi agent. . . . I can't talk now. I'll tell you when I see you. Uh huh. . . . [*Another flash.*] Switchboard at your service. . . . Yes, Miss Welke. Yes'm, I'll get him for you right away. . . . [*Into the phone.*] Miss Welke's mother's had another fainting attack. I've got to call her brother for her. Good-by. [*She consults a list beside her and dials rapidly.*] Mr.

Ralph Welke, please. . . . Hello, Mr. Welke? This is the George Washington Arms. Your sister'd like you to come over right away. Your mother, yes sir. . . . I'll tell her, Mr. Welke. [*She hangs up as the lobby door is heard to open and shut.* STUYVESANT MUNN comes in. *He is a thickish, well-groomed man in his late forties, wearing a tailored overcoat. He carries a derby and cane.*]

MR. MUNN. [*Nervously.*] Any word from Mrs. Munn?

JUNIE. [*Sympathetically.*] No, Mr. Munn. It's dreadful, isn't it, waiting like this?

MR. MUNN. I'm expecting the doctor to drop in.

JUNIE. I hope everything's all right!

MR. MUNN. [*Irritably.*] What's this I hear about a Jewish family moving in?

JUNIE. Just a single man. He comes very well recommended.

MR. MUNN. Semitic?

JUNIE. But a nice quiet one. He was in this morning to see the manager.

MR. MUNN. I understood this building was restricted.

JUNIE. I don't know, Mr. Munn. That's up to the manager.

MR. MUNN. [*Starting for the manager's office.*] Let me talk to him.

JUNIE. He isn't in. He's down seeing the company about why the lights keep going off.

MR. MUNN. Let me know when he comes in. He should know desirable tenants won't put up with that sort of thing.

[*He strides out, glancing at his mail. Another flash from the switchboard.*]

JUNIE. Switchboard at your service. . . . Yes, Miss Welke, right away. . . . Yes'm, I told him. How is she now, Miss Welke? . . . Oh, gee, I'm sorry. . . . Excuse me, Miss Welke. . . . [*Answering an outside flash.*] George Washington Arms. . . . Miss Trumbull? Just a minute. . . . Now then, Miss Welke . . . Miss Welke? . . . [*She pulls out the plug. There is another flash.*] George Washington Arms. . . . Miss Maggie

Sothern? . . . One moment. . . . [PAUL HAUSER, *a mousy, thin-lipped man in his early thirties, comes in. He glances about before gesturing for his mail.* JUNIE *hands it to him.*] There you are, Mr. Hauser.

MR. HAUSER. [*He speaks abruptly, with a slight accent.*] Thanks.

JUNIE. [*As he starts out.*] Mr. Hauser, there was a man in here asking for you.

MR. HAUSER. Who?

JUNIE. He didn't say. He said he'd be back. [MR. HAUSER *sees the newspaper on the chair, snatches it up and spreads it open.*] Plenty of news these days. [MR. HAUSER *rattles the paper.*] That wasn't a plainclothesman, was it?

MR. HAUSER. [*Crumpling up the paper.*] What makes you think so?

JUNIE. He asked a lot of questions.

MR. HAUSER. So—?

JUNIE. Did you see where those saboteurs broke into the Armory last night?

MR. HAUSER. [*Tossing the paper down.*] Did they?

JUNIE. I think it's only fair to tell you the cleaning woman found a gun under your bed.

MR. HAUSER. That! For a cousin in the country to shoot rabbits with.

JUNIE. What'll I tell the man if he comes back?

MR. HAUSER. Nothing.

[*He starts out as* MISS WELKE *comes in. She is a cheerful mouse of forty-odd.*]

MISS WELKE. My brother hasn't gotten here yet, Miss Junie?

JUNIE. No, Miss Welke. How's your mother?

MISS WELKE. Easier, thanks. I left her with the nurse. I was wondering if there was any place I could talk to my brother privately. Mother can overhear everything that's said upstairs.

JUNIE. Sure, Miss Welke. You wait here and when your brother comes you can take him in the manager's office.

MISS WELKE. [*Warmly.*] Thank you, Miss Junie!

[MR. HAUSER *comes back in.*]

MR. HAUSER. Where's the manager?

JUNIE. He won't be back till six.

MR. HAUSER. Do you know the amount of my bill?

JUNIE. You're not leaving us?

MR. HAUSER. [*Indicating his mail.*] I have a call to come to Buffalo.

JUNIE. [*Skeptically.*] Yeah?

MR. HAUSER. Tell him to get it ready the moment he comes in.  
[*There is another flash.*]

JUNIE. George Washington Arms at your service. . . . Mr. Hauser? He's right here. Here's a call for you, Mr. Hauser.  
[*He hesitates, and takes the line.*]

MISS WELKE. I understand a refugee is coming here to live.

JUNIE. [*Trying to overhear MR. HAUSER.*] That's right.

MISS WELKE. I'm so glad! I wonder if there's anything we could do to welcome him, something special. It must be lonely to be a refugee. We have more flowers upstairs than we know what to do with. . . .

MR. HAUSER. [*Into the phone.*] Yes . . . yes. . . . All right, I'll wait. . . .

MISS WELKE. They've had such a hideous time. It doesn't seem credible that the Nazis could go so far.

MR. HAUSER. [*To MISS WELKE.*] The Jews wreck every country they come to.

MISS WELKE. Christ Our Savior was a Jew!

MR. HAUSER. Savior? Saved us from what? You talk like a fool.

MISS WELKE. I take it you don't believe in Christ?

MR. HAUSER. Pah! What's there to believe in? Lovemaking between nations! [*To JUNIE, as he hangs up angrily.*] When they call back, ring me upstairs. And don't forget what I said about the bill.

[*He goes out. JUNIE makes a face.*]

JUNIE. Nazi! I don't care if he is naturalized! [*Another flash*]

*at the board.]* George— Oh, hello! [*MISS WELKE, aware that this is a personal call, moves off and absorbs herself in the newspaper.*] You're what? Jeff, you're not going into *that* again? [*She glances toward MISS WELKE to see if she is listening.*] Jeff, you're not! I don't care if we never get married! . . . You big bum, how many times have I told you I don't mind working. . . . That's nothing but pride. . . . [*All but crying.*] Do you think I want to marry you in the pen? Of course it's where you'll be. . . . Jeff! . . . Jeff!

[*She waits a minute and pulls out the plug, dropping her head on the switchboard. MISS WELKE comes over.*]

MISS WELKE. Junie, Junie dear, what is it? Can I help?

JUNIE. [*Raising her head as the board flashes and plugging in mechanically.*] It's Jeff. . . . He's going to be arrested.

MISS WELKE. Not that nice boy that was in here Saturday?

JUNIE. Do you know what he's up to? Arson!

MISS WELKE. Arson . . . you mean . . . burning . . . ?

JUNIE. A man's been after him—the one he used to work for. He's shut down on account of prioritics and he wants Jeff to burn the warehouse so he can collect insurance. He's promised Jeff two thousand. I've talked him out of it three times, and now he's going to!

MISS WELKE. Can't we head him off? With all the munitions jobs— Look, Junie, my nephew is head of personnel for a firm in Bridgeport—

JUNIE. Oh, Miss Welke—

MISS WELKE. Get hold of him!

JUNIE. I don't know where he is! [*The board flashes.*] Switchboard at your service. . . . Yes, Mr. Munn. . . . Oh, gee! Yes, sir. . . . [*Dialing furiously.*] The baby's coming! . . . Halpern Memorial Hospital? I'm calling for Mr. Stuyvesant Munn. Send the ambulance for his wife right away. . . . That's right. [*Another flash.*] George Washington Arms. . . . Miss Trumbull? [*She plugs in and seizes the telephone book, ruffling it for a number.*] I've thought of something. . . . Maybe I can head

him off! [*She dials.*] Hello. . . . I'd like to speak to Mr. R. Gifford Jones, please. . . . None of your business who's calling. Say I'm phoning for Jeff Waters. Jeffrey D. Waters. Say it's urgent! [*She stares excitedly at MISS WELKE, who stares back.*] Hello, is this Mr. Jones? Mr. Jones, this is a friend of yours calling. Listen, the police are onto that business at the warehouse. It doesn't matter who I am. If you don't head it off you'll land in jail. I'm telling you, Mr. Jones, get hold of Jeff and stop him or you'll go to the penitentiary. Good-bye! [*She hangs up with a bang.*]

MISS WELKE. Good for you!

JUNIE. I hope it works.

[MR. WHETTERN comes in.]

MR. WHETTERN. Has Mr. Hauser come in?

JUNIE. Yes. . . . Who shall I say is calling?

MR. WHETTERN. Mr. Whettern.

JUNIE. [*Plugging in.*] Mr. Hauser? . . . A Mr. Whettern is calling. . . . [*To MR. WHETTERN.*] He'll be right down. Will you have a chair?

MR. WHETTERN. Thanks, I'll wait out here. There's only one elevator?

JUNIE. That's right.

MR. WHETTERN. Thank you. [*He goes into the lobby.*]

JUNIE. [*To MISS WELKE in pantomime.*] That's a detective!

MISS WELKE. [*Incredulously.*] Are you sure?

JUNIE. After Mr. Hauser. Did you see where those guns disappeared from the Armory?

MISS WELKE. You think he was involved?

JUNIE. There was one under his bed. [*Indicating MR. WHETTERN.*] I bet he's got every exit watched. [*There is a flash at the board.*] Yes, Mrs. Peters? . . . Yes'm, they said the ambulance would be here right away. . . . You're welcome. [*To MISS WELKE.*] That's Mrs. Peters, Mrs. Munn's mother. She's up there with her. She's frantic.

[MR. MUNN comes in looking disheveled.]

MR. MUNN. Get me the hospital. I don't want to talk from upstairs.

JUNIE. [*Dialing.*] They said they'd send the ambulance right away, Mr. Munn. How is she?

MR. MUNN. [*Incoherently.*] Terrible, terrible. What about the doctor?

JUNIE. He's out in Riverside but they expect him back in three quarters of an hour.

MR. MUNN. They'll have to send somebody else. . . . Is that the hospital? [*Grasping the telephone from JUNIE.*] Get me Dr. Dunhaver right away. . . . Then somebody else! . . . I *can't* wait, my wife's dying. . . . Forty minutes. I know, I know, I know, but he may take hours. This is no ordinary case. Give me the superintendent. . . . Hello?

[*He continues talking urgently in a low tone ad lib. MR. WILKINS, the manager, comes in. He is a worried, nondescript little man. He crosses hurriedly, taking off his overcoat and hanging it on the rack.*]

MR. WILKINS. Good evening, Miss Welke. Junie, any calls?

JUNIE. Oh, hello, Mr. Wilkins. [*She glances at MR. MUNN, who is still on the wire.*] Mr. Munn wants to see you. And somebody phoned to say the new tenant would be coming in at six. Mr. Hauser wants his bill; he's leaving right away.

MR. WILKINS. Were you waiting to see me, Miss Welke?

MISS WELKE. [*Shaking her head.*] No, thanks, Mr. Wilkins. But I do want to say I think it's splendid, your having a refugee here to live.

MR. WILKINS. [*With a gray smile.*] I had nothing to do with it, really. It was arranged through the owners. Going to get into trouble over it, I'm afraid.

MISS WELKE. I hope not!

JUNIE. [*Plugging in.*] Switchboard at your service. . . .

MR. MUNN. [*To JUNIE, hanging up.*] They're sending Dr. Parkinson over with the ambulance. [*As WILKINS starts to go into his office.*] Look here, Wilkins, I want it definitely understood that

I'm not staying on if you're going to throw this place open to every kike that comes down the road. Mrs. Munn and I will look for another apartment as soon as she's well enough.

[*He starts out. MISS WELKE hesitates, and then stops him. JUNIE twitches the dial and speaks softly into the phone.*]

JUNIE. May I speak with Mr. Jones, please?

MISS WELKE. Mr. Munn, don't you believe in love?

MR. MUNN. [*Outraged. Curtly.*] I do not.

MISS WELKE. What about your wife?

MR. MUNN. What about her?

MISS WELKE. You love her.

MR. MUNN. It's not the same.

MISS WELKE. Love is always the same!

MR. MUNN. God forbid!

[*He brushes past her to the door as MR. HAUSER comes in with MR. WHETTERN at his heels.*]

MR. HAUSER. [*Shouting.*] I'm not a Nazi, I tell you! The cleaning woman, she put it there!

MR. WHETTERN. I'm not accusing you; I'm questioning you.

MR. HAUSER. [*Trying to free himself.*] I'm a naturalized citizen!

MR. WHETTERN. Let's get going if you don't mind.

MR. HAUSER. It's a frame-up! I was never inside of any Armory!

MISS WELKE. [*To JUNIE.*] Did you get Mr. Jones?

JUNIE. [*Shaking her head, then nodding suddenly.*] Hello?

. . . Mr. Jones!

[*She talks pleadingly ad lib. MISS WELKE divides her attention between JUNIE and MR. HAUSER.*]

MR. HAUSER. It's persecution! Just because I'm a foreigner.

[*Jerking his head toward MR. MUNN, who has been listening.*] Arrest him! He's said as much against Jews as I ever did. Why don't you pull him in?

MR. MUNN. Don't drag me into this!

MISS WELKE. Other countries may have gone insane through misfortune, but here in America we haven't that excuse.

[*The competing voices crescendo to a peak as the lights go out.*]

*A spot picks up the door from the lobby. A curious, awkward FOREIGNER enters dressed in white, carrying a doctor's satchel. The room gradually becomes suffused with radiance as he goes from one to another shaking hands. His manner is polite but faintly outlandish.]*

REFUGEE. [*Shaking hands, with a slight bow and accent.*] Good evening—good evening— I am the new tenant— Good evening— It is good of you to receive me— How do you do— [*There is a flash at the switchboard.*]

JUNIE. [*The lights are now on full as before but with a more golden tone.*] George Washington Arms— Jeff! . . . Oh, Jeff! [*Whirling.*] Miss Welke. . . . He's changed his mind! [*Another flash.*] Switchboard. . . . It's for you, Mr. Munn.

MR. MUNN. [*Agonized.*] My wife—she's not . . . ?

JUNIE. Here! [*She hands him the phone.*]

MR. MUNN. Yes? [*He turns slowly, looking from one to another as he listens. A smile spreads over his face. He hangs up.*] A boy! And no trouble at all!

[*Another flash.*]

JUNIE. Switchboard at— For you, Miss Welke! [*MISS WELKE hurries to answer. She, too listens and hangs up wonderingly.*]

MISS WELKE. [*Awestruck.*] The nurse says—just as the lights came on, my mother started to walk across the floor. It's the first time in fourteen years!

[*She turns slowly toward the REFUGEE, who stands awkwardly holding his bag. The rest follow her gaze, staring.*]

VOICE. This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased! [*They continue to stare as the curtain falls.*]

CURTAIN



**HENRY WALLACE'S EXPERIMENT**

**By**

**WALTER HACKETT**

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# HENRY WALLACE'S EXPERIMENT

## CHARACTERS

HENRY A. WALLACE, *as a boy of 17; then at 33*

HENRY WALLACE, SR., *Henry's father*

PROFESSOR P. G. HOLDEN

FARMER, *middle-aged*

FRANK FALTONSON, *a Norwegian farmer*

JED HALL, *another farmer*

HANK JAMES, *16-year-old schoolboy*

THOMAS LUKOWIC, *a schoolboy*

MATHILDA SWENSON, *a schoolgirl*

OTHER BOYS AND GIRLS

SETTING: Office of the editor of *Wallace's Farmer*.

## HENRY WALLACE'S EXPERIMENT

### SCENE I

AT RISE: HENRY WALLACE, as a boy of 17, is examining an ear of corn he is holding. HANK JAMES, another boy, is doing the same thing. HANK fishes in his pocket and ties a tag on his ear, and then places it on one of the crude tables, loaded with ears of corn, on the upstage portion of the room.

HANK. What do you say, Henry? You all set?

HENRY. Guess so. [*He starts to fumble in pockets.*] Wonder what I did with my entry tag. [*Thrusting ear of corn into HANK's hands.*] Here—you hold it till I find my entry tag. [*He starts to go through his pockets.*] Shucks! Wonder where I put it. Had it only an hour ago. [*He fumbles a bit and then finally brings out the tag.*] Here it is. Knew I hadn't left it home. Now let's see if I've got a pencil. [*He starts to fumble again. As he does, HANK holds up HENRY's ear of corn.*]

HANK. You know, Henry, if I were you I wouldn't enter this ear of corn in the contest.

HENRY. [*Stops fumbling.*] Why not? It's from the corn I grew myself, isn't it?

HANK. Sure.

HENRY. And it's the best ear of corn from what I grew, isn't it?

HANK. Maybe it is. But to my way of thinking, it's a mighty scrawny looking ear. In fact, if you were to put it in front of a hog, he'd turn his nose up at it.

HENRY. [*Warmly.*] Is that so?

HANK. Yes, that's so.

HENRY. Well, let me tell you something: a hog doesn't eat for looks; he eats for quality.

HANK. [*A bit vaguely.*] Huh?

HENRY. Never mind. Forget it. [*He takes the ear from HANK and ties his tag to it.*]

HANK. I sort of get what you mean, but the fellow that's going to judge this corn contest—what's his name, he isn't going to figure that way.

HENRY. You mean Professor Holden?

HANK. That's it—Professor Holden. He's going to judge for looks.

HENRY. Maybe.

HANK. Maybe nothing. When they judge horses at the State fair, they judge for looks.

HENRY. And performance.

HANK. And how's an ear of corn going to perform? You think maybe this Professor Holden's going to take a bite off each ear of corn entered in this show?

HENRY. And I say looks don't mean everything.

HANK. Well, they certainly go a long ways.

[*By this time, HENRY has found a stub of pencil. He starts to write on the entry tag, but pauses, then puts pencil back in his pocket. He places his ear on display table.*]

HANK. Hey, aren't you going to put your name on your entry?

HENRY. Nope.

HANK. Why not? [*He repeats it when HENRY doesn't answer.*] I said—why not? [*HENRY still is silent.*] How do you expect folks to know which is yours?

HENRY. I don't want them to know.

HANK. [*Amazed.*] You don't—I don't get what you mean.

HENRY. Hank, my father is publisher and editor of this newspaper, isn't he?

HANK. Course he is.

HENRY. And when he lets the Farm Association hold its Boys' Corn Show in his office, he's sort of in the background, isn't he?

HANK. Well, er—sure. Guess he is. What about it?

HENRY. Even if my entry is as funny looking as you say it is, maybe some folk'll think that I'll be mad if I don't get a prize.

Maybe they'll think that I think I should get one just because my father's letting them hold the show here.

HANK. Aw no! Folks around here all know you better than that.

HENRY. Remember there'll be lots of people here that we've never seen before—people from all over Adair County. So I guess I'll let my entry be anonymous.

HANK. But suppose your ear wins a prize? What'll happen then?

HENRY. [*Laughing.*] Don't worry about that, Hank. Remember what you just said—they judge for looks.

## SCENE II

TIME: *Three hours later the same day.*

SETTING: *Same as Scene I.*

AT RISE: PROFESSOR HOLDEN, MR. WALLACE, SR., and a FARMER are gathered around the exhibit tables. HOLDEN is making some notes on a pad. Spread around the room are a number of high school boys and girls, all ad libbing in low voices. At one side stands HENRY WALLACE and his friend HANK. Finally HOLDEN tears off a sheet of paper from his pad and hands it to the FARMER.

FARMER. [*Calling out.*] Lemme have your 'tention, please. Attention! [*Ad libs gradually stop.*] Thankee. I'd like to announce the results of the Adair County Young Farmers' Corn contest. The blue ribbon, or first prize goes to Thomas Lukowic. Will he please step forward? [*Amid applause of others, LUKOWIC steps up and receives his ribbon.*] The red ribbon goes to Harold James. [*HENRY WALLACE nudges HANK, who ambles forward and receives his ribbon amid applause.*] White ribbon goes to Mathilda Swenson. [*Applause as she steps forward to receive ribbon.*] Guess most of you know that we're plannin' to make this an annual event. We figger it's a chance to encourage you young farmers and farmerettes, as well as the growin' of corn. Corn is

pretty important to us people of the West. 'Bout our most important crop. Remember our ancestors developed it.

HENRY. Pardon me, sir.

FARMER. And furthermore— [*Suddenly realizing the interruption.*] What's that? Someone say somethin'?

HENRY. I did, sir. Our ancestors didn't really develop corn. [*A few ad libs from the onlookers.*]

FARMER. And who are you, young feller?

HENRY. Wallace . . . Henry Wallace.

FARMER. That so? [*He turns to WALLACE, SR.*]

WALLACE. Yes—my son.

FARMER. [*Turning again to HENRY.*] If you're like your pa here and your gran'pa, you must be a student. But when you say folks like me and my gran'pa and my great gran'pa didn't help make corn what it is today, then, young feller, you ain't such a booklearner.

HENRY. People like the ones you mention did help develop corn, but they haven't made nearly as much progress as the Indians did, even with modern methods. The Indian had to depend on corn even more than we do—much more; so he got more corn per acre than we do today.

FARMER. [*Sputters.*] Why, my Yellow Dent corn is . . . is—

HENRY. If the farmers would take time to experiment, they could raise a better corn than Yellow Dent.

FARMER. [*Abruptly.*] And now I'll turn the floor over to our guest of honor, Professor P. G. Holden, who very courteously came all the way here from Ames College at Skunk River to judge our exhibit. Professor Holden. [*Applause from onlookers.*]

HOLDEN. Thank you. I was very glad to come here today. These corn shows help encourage you young people who, within a few years, will be the backbone of our western farming country. When I came here today, I knew I would find some fine exhibits, but I didn't know I was going to encounter an experimental farm philosopher [*Turning to WALLACE, SR.*] such as your son, Henry.

WALLACE. Yes, my son has the courage of his convictions.

HOLDEN. Even if they are a bit far-fetched. [*A ripple of laughter from onlookers. Briskly.*] However, to get back to the subject. When you Iowa corngrowers get to running your own farms, you are going to be beset by many disappointments. You are going to have to maintain the fertility of your land so that you may have bigger and more beautiful corn. By drying your seed earlier in the autumn, by pampering it, you'll get corn such as the one that won today's prize. [*Going to prize-winning ear and holding it aloft so that everyone can see it.*] Notice what a beautiful ear of corn this is.

HENRY. What has looks got to do with it, sir? After all, the pigs can't eat looks. They aren't that particular. [*Laughter from the rest.*]

HOLDEN. [*Still laughing.*] Glad you have your father's sense of humor, Henry. You'll make a good newspaperman. [*Continuing.*] Observe, as I say, this fine ear. Note how strong its middle is. A good, sturdy ear. Now, in direct contrast let me show you this ear. [*He takes an ear from the exhibit and holds it aloft.*] Notice how ugly and scrawny and undeveloped it is when compared to this prize-winning ear. It's like comparing a big bouncing baby to an undernourished one. [*He lowers the second ear a moment and scrutinizes the tag.*] I guess the person who entered this ear did it as a joke, or else he was ashamed of it. He didn't put his name on it. [*Laughing along with the rest of the onlookers, HENRY makes a motion to say something, but his friend HANK restrains him.*] This is a fine example of the kind of corn not to grow. That's all I have to say, except this: remember you young Iowa farmers are a big part of the heartbeat of America. And remember also that corn is king! Thank you. [*Applause from the onlookers.*]

WALLACE. And now if all of you will go into the next room, you'll find a surprise: milk and doughnuts and sandwiches, all served with the compliments of the committee. This way. [*He exits, followed by the others, all ad libbing. As PROFESSOR*

HOLDEN *starts to leave, HENRY takes him by the elbow.*]

HENRY. Excuse me, Professor. May I talk to you a minute?

HOLDEN. Certainly. Oh, you're young Wallace—my challenger.

HENRY. Yes, sir, I mean, no, sir. I hope you aren't angry, the way the chairman of the committee seemed to be.

HOLDEN. Not at all. What is it you want to ask me? [*Noting HENRY's hesitation.*] Don't be bashful.

HENRY. [*Hesitating at first.*] Well, sir, it's this way: for some time now, I've been sort of experimenting.

HOLDEN. Experimenting?

HENRY. Yes—with corn. I've talked with farmers all over the county, too, just to get their ideas.

HOLDEN. And what did you find?

HENRY. Well, among other things, our Iowa farmers don't get their money's worth from their land.

HOLDEN. [*Puzzled.*] I'm afraid I don't follow you, son.

HENRY. Sorry if I don't make myself clear. What I'm trying to say is that we ought to grow more corn per acre than we're growing now.

HOLDEN. In short you're an advocate of high-yield corn.

HENRY. Guess I am.

HOLDEN. A lot of farmers and scientists have had that idea, but none of them have succeeded completely. That's because lots of them raise the wrong kind of corn; and when they insist on raising the wrong kind, they grow corn like this [*Nodding to HENRY's ugly ear he is still holding.*] instead of fine ears like this. [*Holding up the prize-winning ear.*]

HENRY. [*Pointing to his own ear.*] And what's wrong with that ear, sir?

HOLDEN. You couldn't have been listening very closely.

HENRY. Oh, I heard what you said all right, but I don't agree with you. You see I feel this way: Looks mean nothing to a hog.

HOLDEN. It's a good catch phrase, but it doesn't mean any more than a nicely-phrased ad in a mail order catalogue. Do you follow me?

HENRY. [*Dubiously.*] Mmm! Yes—at least as far as my judgment allows.

HOLDEN. [*He laughs and beckons to HENRY.*] Come here with me. [*They go upstage to the Display Tables.*] Henry, I like to see a boy interested in corn. It shows you have some character. Now, I'm going to prove my point. [*Handing the prize-winning ear to HENRY.*] I want you to take this prize-winning ear and say thirty or so more good ears. Next spring I want you to plant them. Plant them, er—one ear to a row of corn. Next year, harvest them. And after that, measure the yield of them. I'll guarantee that you'll find the best looking ears are the heaviest yielders.

HENRY. You're sure of that, Professor Holden?

HOLDEN. I am. Just to make sure, take a few of the scrawnier specimens.

HENRY. All right, sir, I'll do it.

HOLDEN. Good! I'll be interested to learn the result of your experiment. Now suppose we go in and have something to eat. [*He makes a motion to toss HENRY's ugly ear on the table. But HENRY makes restraining gesture.*]

HENRY. Oh, no! Don't! I'll take that ear, too.

HOLDEN. This ear? [*Laughs.*] You must be joking, Henry. This ear is the ugliest one in the entire exhibit.

HENRY. I know that.

HOLDEN. Its owner didn't even bother to put his name on it. Why, you would be lucky to get fifteen bushels to the acre from corn like this.

HENRY. If you're right after I've finished my experiments, I'll put my name to it.

HOLDEN. I . . . what do you mean?

HENRY. That nameless ear belongs to me, sir.

## SCENE III

TIME: *Late Sunday afternoon the following autumn.*

SETTING: *Same as previous scenes.*

AT RISE: HENRY WALLACE is seated at a table. Spread in front of him is a small scale, a large bulging package of bulging envelopes. He is busy scrawling on a large pad. He writes a while, then pauses long enough to rip open an envelope full of corn kernels, which he pours on to the scale. He carefully balances the scale, then squints at measuring bar. This done, he commences to scribble a series of figures on the pad. Finally he drops pencil, nodding to himself, and empties the kernels on the scale back into their envelope.

HENRY. [*To self.*] By gosh! I'm right. Yes, siree, I'm right.

[*At this, MR. WALLACE, SR., enters. He crosses to the table.*]

WALLACE. Right about what, son?

HENRY. [*Looking up.*] Oh, hello, Pa. I didn't hear you come in.

WALLACE. I sort of thought I'd find you here—as usual. [*He goes to a desk and starts to go through drawers.*] Now, where did I leave that copy? [*He finally finds it and stands there looking it over. Satisfied, he puts it in pocket.*] You know, Henry, I don't think you get enough exercise.

HENRY. Exercise! I get enough what with helping here around the newspaper and tending to my experimental plot.

WALLACE. I really didn't mean exercise. Instead, I should have said diversion. Whenever you have a free minute, you're busy working. Last spring you were busy planting your corn. You tended it during your spare time this past summer, and this fall you harvested it; and ever since then you've been busy spending your time crouched over a lot of corn and [*Waving toward the littered desk.*] scales and figures.

HENRY. I like it.

WALLACE. I know you do. And I'm glad you're so ambitious.

But get out with the rest of the fellows and play football and once in a while go to a school or church social. Do you good.

HENRY. I'd rather carry on my experiment.

WALLACE. You know, you're a lot like your Grandpa Henry. He had a purpose. For example, he was sixty when he founded this newspaper. People, his best friends, told him he'd lose his shirt.

HENRY. And ever since, *Wallace's Farmer* has been a success.

WALLACE. Yes, I suppose it has. Perhaps not a big success measured in dollars and cents value, but certainly a very reasonable success when measured in moral satisfaction: the chance continually to urge on the farmer to make a go of his farm and to have him improve his lot. [*Abruptly.*] Well, enough of that. This is Sunday afternoon. It's a day of rest, and not meant to be used to talk over shop. How about the pair of us taking a hike out in the country? What do you say? It's crisp out. A good sun to warm our backs.

HENRY. I might go . . .

WALLACE. [*Heartily.*] Fine! Let's go.

HENRY. If you'll sit down first and listen to my news.

WALLACE. [*Undecidedly.*] Well—

HENRY. I have some real news for you. Pa, my experiment is a success.

WALLACE. What?

HENRY. Yes. I've proved that Professor Holden and the rest of them are all wrong—maybe not all wrong, but at least wrong most of the way.

WALLACE. Then all this fiddling, all this work has come to something?

HENRY. I think it has. In fact I'm sure it has.

WALLACE. Suppose you tell me from the beginning just how you went about all this experimenting business?

HENRY. Well, first of all, Holden, if you remember, told me to take the thirty-three ears he gave me and plant them.

WALLACE. And those thirty-three ears were the best ones in the

exhibit. Right?

HENRY. Yes. Except, I added my own ugly duckling ear, too.

WALLACE. [*Laughs.*] I remember.

HENRY. I took the thirty-four ears and shelled them, being sure to keep each one in a separate pile. Then I planted them, four kernels to a hill, in thirty-four rows.

WALLACE. One ear to a row?

HENRY. That's right. And I took good care of them, too. Hoed them regularly, saw they were watered.

WALLACE. [*Impatient to get to the climax.*] I know, I know. Then you harvested them, shelled the ears and got their dry weight. And you calculated the yield.

HENRY. That's right, Pa. The bushel-per-acre yield.

WALLACE. Don't be so exasperating, son. Get to the point. Exactly what did you find?

HENRY. I found that Professor Holden was talking through his hat.

WALLACE. Hold on, Henry. The professor is an expert. He's—

HENRY. [*Interrupting.*] Maybe so. But my experiment, the one he told me to conduct, shows him up.

WALLACE. Go ahead, go ahead.

HENRY. The professor might as well have picked out those thirty-three ears blindfolded. Out of that show, he might just as well have picked any thirty-three ears and said: "I am sure that these ears are the highest yielders." Pa, my chart shows that the best looking ears gave the worst yield; and the worst looking ones gave the best yield.

WALLACE. [*A bit stunned.*] You're . . . you're . . . positive?

HENRY. I certainly am, Pa. The best looking ones yielded approximately thirty-three bushels to the acre; the worst ran as high as seventy-nine bushels per acre.

WALLACE. Incredible!

HENRY. And something else: You know that prize-winning ear?

WALLACE. Yes.

HENRY. Well, it only yielded thirty-five bushels . . . the very same ear that Professor Holden gave the first prize.

WALLACE. You're sure of what you say, son?

HENRY. As sure as I'm talking to you right now. And here's another point: My own ear, the one Holden said was the ugliest one in the show, well, that yielded the best of all—seventy-nine bushels.

WALLACE. [*More to himself.*] I'll be danged! It isn't right . . . must be wrong . . . farming heresy. [*He sits by HENRY at table.*] Backyard science.

HENRY. [*Eagerly.*] Maybe it is backyard science, Pa. But it's sound as a silver dollar. Look! [*He points to a chart on the table.*] Look . . . look at my chart. [MR. WALLACE scans it, occasionally nodding.] Well, Pa, what do you say?

[MR. WALLACE studies it a while longer, before looking up.]

WALLACE. Well, I still say it isn't right. The best agricultural experts say so.

HENRY. [*Disappointed.*] Oh!

WALLACE. And if one of those chaps from the agricultural colleges were here, he'd say you were wrong.

HENRY. You really think so?

WALLACE. I do! But you could answer him: "Mr. Expert, you can't tell by the looks of a frog how far he can jump."

HENRY. [*Catching on.*] That's just what I say, Pa. Only I say, looks mean nothing to a hog.

WALLACE. [*Repeating it.*] Looks mean nothing to a hog. I guess you've proven that to be so, son. [*He rises and paces.*]

HENRY. Then you think my experiment is a success?

WALLACE. Think? I know it is. [*Motioning toward table.*] Your chart proves that.

HENRY. Do you think I can do anything with this experiment? I mean, do you think I can . . . ? Golly! I guess I don't know what I do mean.

WALLACE. Yes, you do know, Henry. Trouble is that you're ahead of your time. Farmers, like other folks, sometimes don't

take kindly to new ideas.

HENRY. But, if I'm right, it means that our American farmers will be able to raise more corn to the acre. Think what that would mean. It'd mean more money for them, less work. It would be a godsend to a farmer with a few acres.

WALLACE. Yes. But times are good now. Farmers are content. The value of their land is climbing steadily. But come bad times and all that'll be at an end—temporarily, at least. They'll need money, and they'll mortgage their black land. Comes foreclosure and—! [*He shrugs.*]

HENRY. And what, Pa?

WALLACE. And then they'll be glad to listen to you, son. They'll learn that corn, Indian maize, is their bulwark against depression. It'll be their toe-hold against loss of their land . . . land that their fathers and grandfathers and great-grandfathers fought to win, men like your own great-grandfather, Henry . . . plain, grim men who crossed the Alleghenies. We can't let that happen . . . just can't!

HENRY. [*He rises and goes to his father.*] Pa, why can't we start a campaign to help these farmers? Why? Bigger and better corn yields on smaller fields.

WALLACE. Which will also help them to have room to grow other things they need.

HENRY. But don't forget corn, Pa. Corn is basic.

WALLACE. Son, you and I, through *Wallace's Farmer*, are going to start a corn campaign. You're going to continue experimenting. You're going to college. We'll continue our corn campaign until we've educated the farmers to follow the results of your experiments. [*He snaps.*] You go over to that typewriter. Hurry!

[HENRY goes to typewriter at desk.

HENRY. [*Eagerly.*] What are you going to do?

WALLACE. Put a piece of paper in that machine. [HENRY does so. He starts pacing back and forth.] Take this down: "Corn is king!" Paragraph.

[HENRY starts to type, pecking away.]

HENRY. Go ahead.

WALLACE. "The American Indian knew the value of maize. It was his most valued crop. A few kernels of it, carried in his pouch, sustained him on hunting trips, during warfare. And during the long winter months when the snow set in, the Indian knew that it was corn that would feed him and his family. He knew too that—"

[HENRY stops typing.]

HENRY. Slower, Pa. You're going too fast.

WALLACE. Right, son. I'll go slower. Might just as well. We have plenty of time to sell this idea to the American farmer. . . . Besides, you're going to carry on where I leave off! That's going to be your job in life, Henry . . . to sell high-yield corn to the American farmer!

#### SCENE IV

TIME: *The year 1912.*

SETTING: *Same as previous scenes.*

AT RISE: HENRY is seated at desk. He is now a man in his early thirties. He is dictating a letter into a dictaphone.

HENRY. John L. Anderson, R.F.D. 2, Pocatello, Idaho. . . . Dear Mr. Anderson: Thank you for your note of the 17th. I am happy to learn that you find our Number two inbred corn seed we sent you is working out so well. When you plant again next spring, may I suggest that you follow the same procedure as I outlined to you in my first letter. As for the cost of the seed. . . . [At this point, FRANK FALTONSON and JED HALL, two farmers, enter. HENRY breaks off and lays down the mouthpiece of the dictaphone.]

FRANK. [He drops into a chair by the desk. HALL stands by him.] Hi, Henry.

HENRY. Hello, Frank. Hello, Jed.

HALL. [*Laconically.*] 'Lo.

HENRY. Why the visit? More material for an editorial, Frank, or have you managed to convert Jed, here, to our way of thinking?

HALL. No, siree! You ain't got a chance to convert me to your new-fangled idee's 'bout how to raise corn.

HENRY. [*Cheerfully.*] Cheer up, Jed. I'll land you one of these days.

HALL. You been tryin' fer hard on to five years and you ain't succeeded yet.

FRANK. This visit, I guess we'll keep away from talk on your inbred corn, Henry. We came here to say good-bye to your pa. Stopped off at the house. Told us he was on his way to the station and that he'd most likely stop here first.

HENRY. Yes, I'm going to drive him to the train.

JED. Ought to be pretty proud of your pa. Jest think—him going to be Sec-rey-tary of Agriculture.

FRANK. [*Hastily.*] Secretary of Agriculture of the United States. That's a big honor.

JED. Too bad he wouldn't let us friends of his give him a bang-up sendoff.

FRANK. That sounds like your pa, Henry—always doing things the quiet way.

HENRY. You can dress a plough-horse up fancy, but you can't make a race horse out of him. I don't mean that to be uncomplimentary; he's as plain and unassuming as Iowa itself.

JED. And jest as rugged and steady.

HENRY. He ought to be along any minute. If you'll excuse me, I'll finish dictating some correspondence. [*He starts dictating into dictaphone.*] As for the cost of the seed, there is none. Please accept it with my compliments. If any problems arise, please feel free to write to me. Very truly yours, Henry A. Wallace. [*He puts mouthpiece down and starts to thumb over some*

*correspondence on his desk.]*

FRANK. Say, Hen, what's this I hear that maybe you and some others are thinking of starting a seed company?

HENRY. That's right.

JED. [*Sharply.*] What's that? What's that?

FRANK. You mean you haven't heard, Jed? You haven't heard that Henry is starting a seed company? He's aiming to cover the whole country with his corn seed.

JED. That right, Henry?

[HENRY stops fumbling through papers.]

HENRY. Yes, it is. I'm forming a partnership with Newlin and Cassady.

JED. You'll lose your shirts, all three of you.

HENRY. [*Amiably.*] We fully expect to. In fact we're going to sell at a loss for some time in order to get the farmers to buy our product.

JED. Sell at a loss on purpose? What a plumb-fool way to run a business.

HENRY. I'm not so sure of that.

FRANK. You mean that after you've proven your point, you'll sell at a decent profit.

HENRY. Mmm! Perhaps. If we don't make any money, it's relatively unimportant.

[*He hands a piece of paper to JED. FRANK peers over his shoulder.*]

JED. [*Reads.*] "Hi-Bred Seed Company, Henry Wallace, President."

FRANK. [*After putting on his glasses, he reads.*] "Hi-Bred Seed, Developed—Not Discovered. Made to Fit—Not Found By Chance." I'll be swiggered! Henry, I got to hand it to you. You're all right.

JED. Nonsense! Crazy idea! Hen, you been at this corn experimenting of yours fer years. You haven't made a red penny out of it all, and still you continue to try and sell the farmers something they don't want.

HENRY. You're wrong, Jed. They *do* want it; at least thousands of them do. Some day I'll show you my files. The number of converts I've won over run into many thousands. [JED *shrugs*.] Don't shrug. News of my hybrid corn spreads from one farm to the next—slowly perhaps, but nevertheless it spreads.

JED. Hmphh! You know what some folks say?

HENRY. [*Promptly*.] They say that I'm a bit off, that all I think about is my precious corn seed, that as a result I'll end up in the poorhouse. Well, the answer to them is this: Unless I was sure of what I say, do you suppose I'd spend all the time I've spent . . . all the time I'm going to spend for heavens knows how many more years?

FRANK. [*Laughing*.] Give it to him, Henry! Give it to him!

HENRY. Times are getting a bit hard for the farmer. One way for him to lick hard times is for him to raise as much livestock off as little land with as few hands as possible.

JED. That's right.

HENRY. And the way to do that—or let me put it this way: The farmer can do that by raising the greatest amount of corn possible off the least number of acres. [*He smiles*.] Period. Lesson over for the day.

FRANK. [*To JED*.] Convinced now, you old walrus?

[*At this point, MR. WALLACE, SR., now an older man, enters. He is clad in his Sunday best, and is carrying a brief case.*]

WALLACE. What's this, a meeting of kindred corn-growing souls?

JED. Hi, Henry.

FRANK. Come down to say good-bye to you.

WALLACE. Thanks. They'll have to be swift good-byes. My train leaves in ten minutes. [*To his son*.] Son, you think that car of yours can make the station without breaking down?

HENRY. It can try. Where are your bags?

WALLACE. Had them sent to the station.

HENRY. Have you said good-bye to all the Wallaces?

WALLACE. I have. They wanted to go to the station, but I

told them just because I was Secretary of Agriculture, they needn't make any fuss.

FRANK. Sounds just like you. [*He shakes hands with WALLACE, SR.*] When you get down there to Washington, don't forget to let us hear from you.

WALLACE. You'll hear plenty. Good-bye, Frank. See that this boy of mine doesn't turn into corn seed.

FRANK. I'll do that.

WALLACE. 'Bye to you, Jed. [*He shakes hands with JED.*] When you become one of Henry's corn disciples, he'll send me a wire and let me know. [*He laughs.*]

JED. When that happens, I'll gladly pay fer the telegram out of m'own pocket. Good luck, Henry, in your new job. Mighty proud of you.

WALLACE. Thank you, Jed. 'Bye. [*He turns to HENRY.*] Come on, son, got to hurry.

HENRY. [*Catches up his hat and coat from tree and struggles into it. As he and his father exit, he calls back to JED and FRANK.*] Stick around, you two. I'll be back in a few minutes. We'll pick up our argument where we left off.

[*The two WALLACES exit. FRANK and JED stand there. Finally JED drops into a chair.*]

FRANK. [*Regretfully.*] There go a pair of the two smartest men in Iowa.

JED. I allow that his pa is that. But as fer Henry— [*He shakes his head negatively.*] He could be jest as smart as his pa and his gran'pa ahead of him, if he'd a mind to.

FRANK. Of all the doubting Thomases, you're the worst I've ever seen. [*He rises and paces up and down, finally pausing.*] I grant you that Hen may be stubborn about this corn business. I remember once I heard him say to a bunch of farmers: "My aim is to make the world safe for corn breeders." In fact from that, I'd say that what he's got is not just stubbornness, but plain determination.

JED. And I still say he won't git as far as gran'pa did, let alone

his pa. His pa is Secretary of Agriculture. Do you think Hen'll ever be that?

FRANK. [*Accepting the challenge.*] Maybe. Maybe he will. [*He fumbles in his pocket and brings out a clipping triumphantly.*] Here's a clipping I cut out the other day from an agricultural paper, and not the Wallace paper either. Listen to this. [*Reads.*] "Young Henry Wallace has devised a system for forecasting corn yields on the basis of rainfall and temperature records and conducted experiments which succeeded in producing high yield strains of corn." [*Replaces clipping in pocket.*] He's got the stuffing to be Secretary, if he's a mind to be—and if he thinks it's right.

JED. Next thing you know, Frank, you'll be tellin' me that some day Henry'll be President of the United States.

FRANK. That's a pretty big statement to make. But I'll split the difference and say—maybe Henry A. Wallace will be Vice-President of the United States.

THE END

YOUNG LINCOLN  
A Longer Play in Five Scenes  
By  
BETTY SMITH

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# YOUNG LINCOLN

## FOLKS IN THE PLAY

ABE LINCOLN, *an Indiana boy*  
TOM LINCOLN, *his father*  
AARON GRIGSBY, *a Pigeon Creek dandy*  
SQUIRE PATE, *a local judge, Abe's friend*  
MR. BRECKENRIDGE, *famous orator and lawyer*  
DENNIS HANKS, *Abe's cousin*  
JOHN JOHNSON, *Abe's stepbrother*  
LEVI HALL, *Sally Johnson's beau*  
MIS' LINCOLN, *Abe's stepmother*  
SARAH LINCOLN, *his sister*  
TILDY JOHNSON, *a stepsister*  
SALLY JOHNSON, *another stepsister*  
LUCY LARKIN, *the belle of Buckhorn Valley*  
ZEKE, *the fiddler*  
BOYS AND GIRLS

TIME: Around 1825.

PLACE: The Buckhorn Valley on Little Pigeon Creek which is in Southern Indiana.

SCENE 1. The Lincoln cabin. An autumn evening.

SCENE 2. The same. Winter, a year later.

SCENE 3. The same. The following summer.

SCENE 4. The same. The following winter.

SCENE 5. The same. The following spring.

# YOUNG LINCOLN

## ACT ONE

### SCENE I

*A mellow harvest moon shines down on a log cabin in Southern Indiana. The cabin stands on a quarter section of land in the Buckhorn Valley on Little Pigeon Creek.*

*The cabin walls are made of rough logs chinked together with white clay. Rough pegs driven in the center of upstage wall form a crude ladder to the loft above where ABE sleeps. To right of ladder is a cot covered with a bright patchwork quilt. To left of ladder is a door leading to the cabin's other room. In center of left wall is a door made of wide planks and large hinges, which leads to the outdoors. A crude cupboard, holding pewter bowls and mugs, is upstage of door. Downstage of door is a low bench holding a bucket of water and a gourd for drinking purposes.*

*There is a huge stone fireplace in center of right wall. Enormous logs are kept burning in it. A black pot hangs by a crane over the fire. Other pots and skillets hang from nails about the fireplace. There is a home-made wooden shovel standing nearby, and a rush broom. A musket rests on pegs over the mantelpiece. There are a few tattered books on the mantelpiece and a thick candle burning in a pewter holder. Downstage of fireplace is a small window through which the moonlight streams and helps illuminate the room. Several wildcat skins are pegged to the wall.*

*The furniture is simple: a crude table made from the trunk of an enormous tree, the top side planed smooth, but the sides still carrying the bark. Several crudely made three-legged stools supply the remainder of the furniture.*

*As the curtain rises the strains of fiddling are heard. The tune is "Skip to, My Betty Lou." \* SARAH LINCOLN, a pretty girl of seventeen, TILDY and SALLY JOHNSON, her stepsisters, the former eighteen and the latter fifteen, are going through the figures of a square dance with JOHN JOHNSON and two local boys. The girls wear homespun dresses, with close fitting bodices and full skirts, and the boys wear homespun shirts and fringed buckskin pants.*

*TOM LINCOLN, a sturdy middle-aged man of medium height, is sitting near the fireplace, whittling. His wife, a kindly faced woman with graying hair, dressed in a homespun dress and checkered apron, is standing nearby watching the dancing with a beaming smile. ABE is at present out of sight up in the loft.*

ZEKE. [*Scraping away.*] You swing Sal and I'll swing Sue. [*BOYS swing GIRLS.*] Now I'll swing Sal and you swing Sue. [*BOYS change partners.*] Now prom-eeee-nade! [*BOYS place arms about partners' waists and they walk around in a circle.*] Plow all day and dance all night. [*Laughter.*] And I'm tired! [*Stops fiddling suddenly.*]

DANCERS. [*In disappointed chorus.*] Aw-w-w-l

TILDY. Aw come on, Zeke. Just one more.

ZEKE. Not till after I refresh myself with some cidy. [*Drinks from jug at his feet.*]

SARAH LINCOLN. [*Leaving group and going to stand with her stepmother.*] I reckon I don't want to dance no more.

TILDY JOHNSON. Sarah Lincoln! You're mean!

SARAH. I'm tired.

SALLY JOHNSON. She's a-worrying 'bout her beau being late.

JOHN. Ain't no use waiting on Aaron Grigsby, Sarah.

SARAH. [*Indignantly.*] Who said . . .

TILDY. We all know you're in love with Aaron.

SARAH. Ain't!

\* A song for this dance may be found in "American Songbag" by Carl Sandburg.

SALLY. Don't set your heart on Aaron. He's too fine and mighty for plain folk like us.

SARAH. Don't know what you're a-talking about.

DENNIS. Look at her blush.

SARAH. Ma! Make them stop teasing me.

MIS' LINCOLN. Oh, go 'long, Sarah.

BOYS and GIRLS. [*Chanting.*] Sarah's sweet on Aaron! Sarah's sweet on Aaron.

SARAH. [*Calling.*] Abe! Abe!

ABE. [*His head and shoulders appearing in the loft opening of the ceiling.*] What's all the hollering for, sister?

SARAH. Make them quit.

ABE. [*Drawling a command.*] Quit!

LEVI HALL. Come down and make us.

TILDY. Yes. Come down, Abe. We need you for the dancing.

ABE. I ain't a dancing feller.

SALLY. Please!

ABE. Nope. Got an interesting book to read up here. "Revised statutes of Indianny." [*Groan from BOYS and GIRLS.*] It's got the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence in it, too. Walked ten miles to borrow it and now I'm shore a-going to read it.

MIS' LINCOLN. From what I know of my stepson, he ain't a-going to let loose of that book for no dancing.

ABE. I'll come down come corn shucking time. [*He disappears.*]

LEVI. [*Going to TOM.*] You dance a set with us, Mr. Lincoln.

TOM. [*Rising in confusion.*] Me?

DENNIS. You make out like you're a gal.

TOM. [*Edging to door.*] I just remembered I ain't finished the chores. [*At door.*] I got to slop them hogs. [*Rushes out.*]

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Calling after him.*] Bring the shucking corn back with you.

LEVI. [*Going to MIS' LINCOLN.*] Maybe you'll go through a figger with us?

MIS' LINCOLN. Law, no! Why, land o' Goshen, it's twenty years since I danced. *I'd creak.*

[*Laughter, topped by knocking on door.*]

TILDY. Now who . . .

SARAH. [*Happily clapping her hands.*] It's Aaron! It's Aaron!

TILDY. [*Calling.*] Come in iff'n you're good-looking.

[AARON GRISBY *enters. He is different from the other boys. He wears fawn colored breeches, strapped under the instep, the same color topcoat and a flowered vest. His white shirt is frilled and he wears a high bell-shaped beaver hat which he removes with a flourish as he enters.*]

SARAH. [*Happily running to him.*] Aaron!

AARON. [*Bowing.*] Good evening, Miss Sarah. [*Bowing to MIS' LINCOLN.*] You'll pardon me for being late.

DENNIS. Oh, shore! [*Mincing.*] My goodness me!

[*Guffaws from BOYS and giggles from GIRLS.*]

AARON. But when you see my excuse . . . [*He turns and extends his hand with a bow and draws LUCY LARKIN into the room. In contrast to the other girls, she is daintily dressed in a flower-sprigged muslin, delicate shawl and plumed poke bonnet.*] Miss Larkin wanted to attend a real backwoods party and I thought you wouldn't mind. . . .

[*LUCY steps into the room with a smile.*]

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Coming forward.*] Welcome, Miss Lucy.

LUCY. Thank you. [*At LUCY's entrance, SARAH's happy smile changes to a sad look and she retreats back to the fireplace. The girls look at her, toss their heads and exchange knowing looks with each other, the while they surreptitiously examine LUCY's clothes. The boys simper bashfully, and awkwardly try to smooth down their hair, etc.*] Where's Abe? [*She looks around.*]

TILDY. Abe ain't dancing.

SALLY. Abe would rather read a book any old day than dance with a gal. [*With emphasis.*] Any old gal.

[*LUCY tosses her head.*]

JOHN JOHNSON. [*Comes forward awkwardly and eagerly.*] We

got enough for a set now. I'd be proud if you'd take me for a partner, Miss Lucy.

LUCY. I don't know as I care to dance.

TILDY. Aaron?

AARON. Thank you, no. These bouncing country dances are too fatiguing.

DENNIS. We got a fiddler and we got boys and gals but we ain't got no dancing.

ZEKE. [*Going to door.*] Reckon I'll help Tom carry in the corn.

[*TOM kicks open door and enters with an overflowing basket of corn.*]

MIS' LINCOLN. You spoke up too late, Zeke.

[*BOYS take basket and empty corn on table. All laugh and chatter. TOM gets two empty baskets and places them on floor.*]

SARAH. [*Calling.*] Abe! Abe!

JOHN. Corn's in, Abe.

ABE. [*Awkwardly climbs down ladder back to room. He is much taller than any other boy there and dressed more shabbily. He gets to the bottom, turns and sees LUCY.*] Didn't know we had company. [*Starts to scramble back up the ladder.*]

LUCY. [*Sweetly.*] You aren't afraid of me, Abe? [*Other GIRLS grab ABE's legs and pull him down. LUCY goes to him with an arch smile.*] Or are you?

ABE. [*Bashfully shuffling his feet.*] A gal's the only thing I'm afraid of that I know won't hurt me.

JOHN. Come on! Let's git shucking.

DENNIS. Whoever gets the red ear gets to kiss any gal in the room.

LEVI. I aim to kiss Mis' Lincoln if I get it.

MIS' LINCOLN. Go 'long with you. I'm an old married woman.

LEVI. But you shore bake good pies.

[*Laughter.*]

JOHN. [*As BOYS gather about the table, excepting AARON and ABE, and GIRLS line up in a row, excepting LUCY, who stands*

*near the fireplace.] Come on, Abe.*

ABE. Don't believe I will. With my bad luck I'd be shore to get the red ear.

MIS' LINCOLN. But that would be *good* luck.

ABE. But who would kiss me?

SARAH. I'm willing.

ABE. Shucks. You're my sister. That wouldn't count.

SALLY. Tildy and I would.

ABE. You're my stepsisters. That would only half count.

LUCY. [*Archly.*] I'm not related to you.

ABE. I'll do it! [*Hastily.*] Shuck the corn, I mean.

[*Laughter.*]

AARON. Look here, Abe. I want to say . . .

DENNIS. Don't be a spoil-sport, Aaron.

LEVI. Come on. Take your chances.

[*Thrusts an ear of corn into AARON's hand. AARON stares at it awkwardly.*]

DENNIS. You line up too, Mis' Lincoln. You're a gal.

SARAH. Come on, Ma.

[*GIRLS grab MIS' LINCOLN and pull her into line. LUCY still stands aloof.*]

TOM. Reckon I might as well git in on it.

[*ZEKE starts a lively tune but plays softly during shucking. AARON stands apart, awkwardly struggling with the ear and removing leaves daintily one by one. Other BOYS rip off the leaves and throw the shucked corn into the baskets.*]

JOHN. 'Nother white ear.

LEVI. [*Tossing another ear over his shoulder.*] Reckon there's nothing *but* white ears in this Lincoln corn.

TILDY. [*Stepping forward eagerly.*] You done got a red ear, Dennis.

[*They stop and wait for DENNIS to strip the corn.*]

DENNIS. Nope! [*Holds up white ear and tosses it into basket.*] Tildy, you'll just have to wait until we're a-walking on a dark road.

[*Laughter.*]

MIS' LINCOLN. I see a red ear and it ain't corn. [*Tweaks TILDY's ear.*]

TOM. [*Throwing a half-shucked ear into the basket.*] What am I a-doing this for? I can git to kiss my wife any day without a-working for it. [*Leaves group and gives MIS' LINCOLN a smacking kiss. ZEKE stops playing and he, TOM, and MIS' LINCOLN form a separate group. TOM notices AARON still struggling with his first ear.*] Seems like you ain't getting nowheres fast, Aaron.

AARON. [*Angrily.*] The blasted leaves are pasted on to the corn.

JOHN. [*Tossing another ear.*] Shucking shore ain't no work for a gentleman. I can tell you that.

[*ABE leaves the group quietly. He carries the red ear in his hand. He stands alone and looks down at it, ill at ease. BOYS shuck a few more ears, then they see that ABE has the red ear. They abandon the shucking and crowd around ABE.*]

DENNIS. Old Abe's done got it.

LEVI. Now you got to kiss a gal.

ABE. [*Bashfully.*] Don't believe I know how.

[*LUCY, with a sweet smile, steps up to him coyly.*]

JOHN. Close your eyes and git it over with, boy.

[*Gives ABE a shove which brings him close to LUCY. ABE looks at LUCY, who smiles encouragingly, wipes his mouth on his sleeve, then kisses her cheek bashfully.*]

AARON. [*Angrily coming between them.*] What do you mean, kissing my girl?

ABE. [*Drawling.*] I thought Sarah was your gal.

SARAH. Abe, please. . . .

AARON. I brought Miss Lucy here and for the evening she's my girl.

ABE. You folks from Philadelphia's got queer ways, a-courting one gal and claiming them all.

AARON. Why don't you get a girl of your own, you great big ugly rail splitter.

ABE. [*Laying down his red ear very carefully.*] I reckon I got something I must settle with you right now, Aaron.

AARON. [*Throwing down his corn.*] Yes. It's high time I taught you a lesson.

JOHN. Careful, Aaron. Abe's cham-peen wrestler of the whole Buckhorn Valley.

AARON. And I studied boxing when we lived in Philadelphia.

LUCY. [*Pleased.*] Surely you gentlemen aren't going to fight over me?

ABE. Ma, take the gals away to primp their hair or something. MIS' LINCOLN. Shoo, gals.

[*She shoos them into the bedroom. LUCY hangs back. MIS' LINCOLN takes her arm and escorts her in. Door closes after the GIRLS, then cautiously opens a crack. Many pairs of feminine eyes are seen peeking out. BOYS clear a space by pushing furniture aside. Then they form a crude circle around the fighters. TOM and ZEKE stand aside.*]

ABE. Three out'n four falls wins.

AARON. I agree. [*They step far apart, then come towards each other with curved hands extended. As they close in, AARON puts his foot out suddenly and trips ABE. As ABE falls, he pins his shoulders to the ground.*] One for me!

DENNIS. Ain't fair! I saw him trip Abe.

ABE. [*Getting up as AARON releases him.*] Fair enough. We'll count that one for him. It's the only one he'll get.

[*Suddenly grabs AARON, holds him high over his head, then tosses him to the ground. He falls with a mighty thump. Chorus of "oh's" from the bedroom. ABE holds his shoulders to the floor for a second, then backs away.*]

LEVI. Better cry quits, Aaron.

[*But AARON shakes his head stubbornly as he slowly gets to his feet. Again ABE throws him.*]

JOHN. Two for Abe.

ABE. [*Kneeling on AARON's chest.*] Aaron, let me give you some

advice. Ain't no gal worth two men fighting over her. [*He steps back.*]

AARON. [*As he gets to his feet and painfully rubs his sore places.*] There's something in what you say. [*Grudgingly.*] You win.

[*ABE helps him to his feet.*]

ABE. I just want to know the one thing: Who you a-courting? Lucy Larkin or my sister, Sarah?

AARON. It's none of your business, of course. But I intend to marry Sarah.

ABE. How come you're sparking other gals, then?

AARON. Out in the civilized world, a man doesn't go into a monastery when he becomes engaged to a girl.

ABE. Out here it's different. When a feller starts being serious with one gal, he lets loose of other gals. And when folks marry out here, they stay married till death, like the preacher tells them.

AARON. I can do without the moralizing. And Sarah and I will thank you not to interfere.

ABE. You ain't got my say-so whether you can marry her.

TOM. [*Pushing forward.*] He's got my say-so. I'll be proud to own you for a son-in-law, Aaron. [*As he pumps AARON's hand he turns to ABE.*] Don't you go starting nothing, Abe. Aaron's folks own nigh on a thousand acres hereabouts.

ABE. [*Scratching his head.*] I can't understand how high'n mighty folk like you all want a plain gal like Sarah in the family.

AARON. I happen to love her and . . .

ABE. And . . . ?

AARON. And my father said that for folks like us to survive in this new country, we got to get some good stock into the family.

ABE. Don't you go calling my sister . . . stock.

AARON. I meant no offense, I'm sure.

ABE. Well, if you're a-going to be my kin, I guess I'll have to like you.

[*He holds out his hand. AARON hesitates a moment and then takes it.*]

JOHN. [*Pulling open the bedroom door.*] Fight's over!  
[*The GIRLS almost fall into the room.*]

TILDY. Who beat?

LUCY. [*Coming to ABE with a smile.*] Why, Abe, of course. He always wins.

DENNIS. [*Under his breath to other BOY.*] As if they didn't know who beat!

SALLY. And now we're all going for a hay ride in the moonlight.

[*The GIRLS have put on their shawls and bonnets while in the other room. ABE whispers something to SARAH. She smiles happily, hugs his arm, and then goes to stand next to AARON.*]

TILDY. You coming along, Abe?

ABE. I reckon not.

TILDY. Aaron, you coming?

AARON. Yes.

ABE. Who you taking on the hay ride, Aaron?

AARON. [*Looks once at LUCY, then at ABE.*] Why, Sarah, of course.

[*He pulls her hand through his arm, she smiles up at him happily.*]

LUCY. [*Pouting.*] Now, Abe, you did me out of an escort. You'll have to take me.

ABE. Mighty sorry, Miss Lucy. But I got a borrowed book I got to return in the morning and I aim to set up and read it.

LUCY. You're heartless.

ABE. But John will be mighty proud to take you.

[JOHN, beaming, comes forward and offers his arm with awkward gallantry.]

LUCY. [*Hesitates, looks at ABE, then smiles dazzlingly at JOHN, slips her arm through his, places her other hand on his arm and they go out smiling goodnight at the LINCOLNS as they do so.*] I adore hay rides.

[TILDY and SALLY pair off with their boys. AARON goes out with a very happy SARAH.]

DENNIS. [To FIDDLER.] You come, Zeke. We want your music. [FIDDLER goes to door.] Take your fiddle.

FIDDLER. [Handing him fiddle.] You take it. I'll take the jug. [Picks up jug and follows them out. MIS' LINCOLN stands in doorway, waving good-bye.]

TOM. [Happily.] Ain't democracy a wonderful thing? It makes out my gal Sarah to be just as good as the Grigsbys.

ABE. [Drawling.] The way I look at it, it makes out the Grigsbys almost as good as Sarah.

MIS' LINCOLN. They're a-leavin'. [Calls.] Good-bye! Good-bye! [FIDDLER starts playing the tune of "Auld Lang Syne." GIRLS and BOYS call good-bye over the playing. As she closes the door, they start to sing to the tune. The song fades away as they drive off. They sing to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne." . . .

"Should old acquaintance be forgot  
And never brought to mind.  
Let Jackson be our president  
And leave Adams far behind."

[Song dies away as . . .

## CURTAIN

## SCENE II

TIME: *A year later.*

SCENE: *The same.*

*It is a winter's night. The fire is burning brightly. The tree branches outside the window are covered with snow.*

AT RISE: TOM has gone to bed and lies sleeping on the cot under the patchwork quilt. He snores steadily and rhythmically.

ABE, wearing another homespun shirt and buckskin pants which have grown a little short for him, lies on his stomach before the

*fire, reading from an open book. His feet are bare and about ten inches of lean shin bone protrude from the ends of his pants. MIS' LINCOLN is at the table kneading dough for tomorrow's bread. The firelight is the only light in the room.*

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Softly.*] Abe? [*No answer. A little louder.*] Abe! [*But he is so concentrated, reading, that he doesn't answer her.*] Tommy? [*Loud snore. She calls louder.*] Tommy!

TOM. [*In his sleep.*] Huh?

MIS' LINCOLN. You asleep?

TOM. [*Definitely.*] Yes!

MIS' LINCOLN. Wake up! I want to talk to someone.

TOM. [*Sleepily.*] Ain't the day long 'nough to talk in?

MIS' LINCOLN. Do you think Sarah's happy with Aaron?

TOM. He gives her enough to eat, don't he?

MIS' LINCOLN. But she always looks like she's been crying.

TOM. [*Leaning on his elbow.*] Listen! Your gal Tildy's married and ain't complaining. Your gal Sally is happy enough with her man. You let me do the worrying 'bout my gal.

MIS' LINCOLN. I worry as much over Abe and Sarah as I do over my own children. I *know* Sarah ain't happy.

TOM. Now don't go looking for trouble. I don't want her back here on my hands.

[*ABE turns a page of the book.*]

MIS' LINCOLN. I'm worried. They ain't married a year yet and he treats her so mean-like.

TOM. Mis' Lincoln, I want my sleep. Got work to do tomorrow.

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Scornfully.*] What work?

TOM [*Drowsily.*] Well, something might turn up. You never can tell.

[*Lies down, turns his face to the wall, and is soon snoring away again. MIS' LINCOLN sets the dough in a large wooden bowl, places a towel over it and sets it on the hearth, not too close to the fire. She bends down and tousles ABE's hair.*]

ABE. [*Looks up with a smile.*] Feller in the book has some mighty interesting ideas. [*He stands up and stretches.*] That's true, that the Indian has the most right.

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Puzzled.*] How's that?

ABE. [*Striding to the table.*] But what about the Negro's side? [*Raising his voice.*] No! [*Gives the table a mighty thump.*] I ain't agreeing with him!

TOM. [*His snore ends in a strangled gurgle. He sits up suddenly.*] Now what?

MIS' LINCOLN. Hush! It's just Abe arguing with what the feller says in the book.

TOM. [*Shouting.*] Abe, let loose of that book and go to bed.

ABE. What say, Pa?

TOM. It's nearly nine o'clock and I want my sleep.

ABE. But the feller wants to know who's worse off . . . the Indian or the Negro? Who do you think, Pa?

TOM. [*Lying down and pulling the cover over his head.*] Ain't caring.

ABE. [*Pulling the cover down.*] You got to care. Who's got the most right to complain?

TOM. [*Violently, coming to sitting position.*] I have. I ain't getting my sleep. [*Again lies down and pulls cover over his head.*]

MIS' LINCOLN. You ought to get some sleep, Abe. You worked mighty hard felling trees today.

ABE. I'll be going to bed soon, Mother.

[*He goes back to his book. MIS' LINCOLN removes her apron and folds it neatly, putting it away in the cupboard. She takes a worn Bible and a pair of spectacles from the mantelpiece. She sits near the fire, puts on the spectacles, opens book and reads slowly, tracing the words with her finger and moving her lips silently. TOM is snoring peacefully. There is a loud pounding on the door. Again TOM's snore ends in a strangling sound. He jumps to his feet and is revealed in a rather short old-fashioned night shirt.*]

TOM. Doggone it! Tomorrow night I sleep out with the horse.

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Getting to her feet.*] Who is it?

SARAH. [*Outside.*] Mother! Let me in!

ABE. It's Sarah!

[*He runs and opens the door. SARAH LINCOLN comes in. She has a dark shawl wrapped about her. She runs to MIS' LINCOLN.*]

SARAH. Mother, let me stay here. Oh, mother! [*She sobs.*]

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Takes her in her arms and pats her hair.*] There, there.

ABE. Course you can stay here, Sarah.

SARAH. I can't stay with Aaron no more.

TOM. You married him for better or worse and you're a-going to stay with him now.

ABE. No, she ain't. I never did like Aaron Grigsby nohow. He and his folks look down on her.

TOM. [*Coming forward.*] Abe, you go take her home to her man.

ABE. [*Drawling.*] I reckon I won't.

TOM. I reckon you'll do like I say till you're growed.

ABE. [*Still drawling.*] Can't grow no more less'n it's sideways.

TOM. [*Shouting.*] Well, she can't stay in my house.

AARON. [*Loud banging on door.*] Sarah? [*Door is pushed open. AARON GRIGSBY strides in.*] Where's . . . [*Sees her.*] Oh, there you are. You're going right home with me.

ABE. Sarah ain't going back with you less'n she wants to.

AARON. That's mighty big talking, Abe.

ABE. [*Drawling.*] I'm a mighty big feller.

AARON. The law says she has to do as I say.

ABE. I ain't caring 'bout no law. She's a free creature and no one's got the right to hold her.

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Gently.*] Now, Aaron, you ought to be kinder to Sarah. What's come over you? You used to be right fond of her.

AARON. She didn't tell me about her family. Lately I've been hearing a lot of talk about the Hanks.

ABE. [*Dangerously.*] What are they saying about my mother's folks?

SARAH. Don't tell him, Aaron. Don't tell him. I'll go back with you. I won't complain no more. Only don't tell him.

ABE. What you holding over her head?

AARON. You want plain talking?

ABE. I do.

AARON. There's a plain name for your mother's folks.

ABE. [*Quietly.*] Speak it!

AARON. [*Hedging.*] It isn't as if it were a secret. Why everybody . . . apparently . . . that is, everybody but me, knows.

ABE. Knows what?

AARON. Why . . . er . . . that the Hanks were nothing but poor white trash.

ABE. [*Gently.*] Mighty sorry you said that, Aaron. Now I got to give you the whupping of your life.

AARON. [*Frightened, backs off.*] No, Abe. No. I'm only repeating common gossip.

[*ABE advances on him.*]

MIS' LINCOLN. Don't, Abe.

[*ABE hits him and he is thrown across the room. He falls with a mighty thump and lies still.*]

TOM. [*In awe.*] Reckon he's dead?

ABE. Pshaw, no. He just landed on his head. [*He pulls AARON to his feet.*]

AARON. [*Caressing his jaw.*] Oh-h-h. [*Goes to door.*] I don't know as I want her to come back . . . now. [*Goes out.*]

TOM. [*Furiously to SARAH.*] You done caused enough trouble coming around here in the middle of the night with your family troubles. Now you get on home.

SARAH. I reckon you're right, Pa. I shouldn't have run away. He punished me by telling Abe about our folks. So it was no use. I'll go back to him.

ABE. I ain't letting you go.

SARAH. You're a good brother, Abe. You shouldn't be made

sad hearing such things. [*She kisses his cheek and goes to the door. Calls.*] Wait for me, Aaron.

ABE. [*Calls.*] No, Sarah. Don't go!  
[*She closes the door gently after her.*]

TOM. [*Climbing back into bed.*] Now maybe I can get me some sleep.

ABE. You ain't a right kind of father letting him speak against my dead mother and her folks.

TOM. He ain't said nothing that wasn't true. Don't know why you're getting so r'iled up about it. Warn't none of the Hanks's I recollect could even write their name.

MIS' LINCOLN. Tom Lincoln! You ought to be ashamed of yourself talking to the boy that way!

[*ABE sits by the fire, his head in his hands.*]

TOM. [*Placatingly.*] Aw now, Mis' Lincoln. . . .

MIS' LINCOLN. I could tell you things about the Lincoln family. . . .

TOM. It's way past my bedtime.

MIS' LINCOLN. You listen to me, Tom Lincoln.

TOM. [*Getting up again.*] Doggone it! Can't get no peace in my own home. [*Picks up the patchwork quilt and strides to the door.*] I'm going to sleep out in the barn. [*Muttering as he goes out.*] Who's got the most right to complain?

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Closes the door after TOM and then sits next to ABE.*] I wouldn't be thinking about what Aaron said.

ABE. Is it true? Have people got cause to talk about my mother's folk?

MIS' LINCOLN. Your folks were plain American people. They had their faults and their virtues. Now Lucy Hanks . . . well, maybe she was a little wild . . . or so folks said because she lived her own way. But she was a wonderful woman, full of fire and spirit and right honest about it. But when she found a man she loved, she made him a good wife. She raised eight children to be good hard-working men and women. Your mother was her oldest child.

ABE. I remember my mother. She was gentle and good.

MIS' LINCOLN. All who knew Nancy Hanks say so. I mind that here was something about her, something sacred-like that made her quiet and understanding. [*She puts her hand over his.*] Her son is that way, too. [*Suddenly, he turns his head away.*] Don't be grieving, son. Time passes. People forget.

ABE. I won't forget.

MIS' LINCOLN. Pshaw, boy, it's a mighty pretty world. You'll love a sweet girl some day and be happy as all get out.

ABE. I ain't marked for happiness.

MIS' LINCOLN. But you're young yet.

ABE. Yes, I'm young. I got time. I'll study . . . learn everything I can. I'll start getting Squire Pate to teach me about the law.

MIS' LINCOLN. I'm mighty sorry that your father couldn't give you more'n a year of schooling.

ABE. But I'll read all the books I can find. And some day I'll do something in the world that will make people remember our name and speak well of it.

MIS' LINCOLN. I know you will, son.

ABE. [*Walks to window and stares out.*] I'll cut timber, split rails, and plow land like I'm doing now for many years to come. But all the while I'll be getting ready for something . . . something. . . .

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Rising.*] Oh, Abe! You're a mighty good boy. [*She goes to him and kisses him on the cheek as . . .*]

CURTAIN

### SCENE III

TIME: *The following summer.*

SCENE: *The same.*

AT RISE: *The sun is pouring in through the window and open door. The tree outside the window, a dogwood, is in blossom. Somewhere a bird keeps calling, "Purty, purty, purty."*

SQUIRE PATE, *a short, rosy, stout man of middle age, is sitting at the table with ABE. There are two or three shabby law books open on the table. The SQUIRE is giving ABE a lesson in law.*

SQUIRE [*As he closes book.*] That's fine, Abe. You argued that very well. You'll make a good lawyer some day. But I hope you won't go into politics.

ABE. I don't know, Squire. I am powerful fond of making speeches.

SQUIRE. [*Laughs.*] Have a seegar, Abe? [*Takes two stogies from his pocket.*]

ABE. Thank'ee. I don't use tobacco.

SQUIRE. I forgot. You neither drink nor smoke. Well, I expect you have to keep in trim, being champion wrestler of Southern Indiana. [*Putting stogies away.*] I don't like to smoke alone. [*Pulling another book towards him.*] Now we'll have a go at the state statutes. [*But ABE gets up, goes to the window, and looks out sadly.*] What's the matter, Abe? [*ABE doesn't answer. The SQUIRE gets up and goes to him.*] Still grieving over Sarah?

ABE. She was buried just three months ago today.

SQUIRE. I heard that they buried her baby with her.

ABE. Aaron Grigsby said there was no sense in making two coffins.

SQUIRE. How old was your sister's baby?

ABE. Just two days.

SQUIRE. [*Putting his arm about ABE's shoulder.*] You've had more than your share of sorrow, Abe.

ABE. The two people I loved best in the world, my mother and my sister, lie buried in that clearing yonder. [*He indicates the clearing.*]

SQUIRE. Yes. But Mis' Lincoln's been a mighty good mother to you.

ABE. Yes. Mighty good. She's always coming between me and Pa in my favor. [*Pause.*] They say Aaron's already a-courting Lucy Larkin for his second wife. Sarah's so soon forgotten. And my mother's forgotten.

SQUIRE. The world moves on.

ABE. [*Turning away from the window.*] I reckon I'll be forgotten some day, too.

SQUIRE. I wouldn't say that, Abe. [*Cheerfully.*] Now come! I have some news that I think will make you very happy.

ABE. [*Sincerely.*] Squire, it's mighty good of you to give your Sunday afternoons up to me to teach me about the law. I'm sorry I got into one of my dark spells.

SQUIRE. That's all right. We all have our moods.

ABE. But it seems like I'm more cut out for sadness than happiness.

SQUIRE. [*Heartily as he sits down.*] Come, come! Aren't you interested in my news?

ABE. [*Sitting at the table.*] 'Course I am, Squire.

SQUIRE. Do you recall Mr. Breckenridge?

ABE. I shore do. I walked over to Booneville, Warwick County, a few weeks past to hear him defend a boy.

SQUIRE. I was there. He made a magnificent plea to the jury.

ABE. I he'erd him. [*Solemnly.*] And Squire, it was his speaking that made me decide to be a lawyer.

SQUIRE. So?

ABE. Is your news about him?

SQUIRE. I'm going to ride the next circuit with him.

ABE. That's fine.

SQUIRE. And . . . [*He pauses impressively.*] he's going to stop by here to pick me up.

ABE. [*Incredulously.*] He's going to come here?

SQUIRE. I'll introduce you to him. You'll have an opportunity to speak to him.

ABE. I will? [*He grins happily.*] I . . . I . . . don't know what to say. Mr. Breckenridge . . . that great lawyer. . . .

SQUIRE. Happy?

[*ABE nods.*]

ABE. [*Holding out his hand.*] You're a mighty good friend to me, Squire.

SQUIRE. Tut, tut! [*Shakes his hand.*] And now let's get on with state statutes.

ABE. Oh, I already done figured them out.

SQUIRE. Good!

ABE. It's this way. I run the ferry across the Ohio River from the Indianny side.

SQUIRE. Yes. And I believe the Dill brothers run it from the Kentucky side?

ABE. When I got passengers for the Kentucky side, I got to ferry them out to the middle of the river and wait for the Dill boys to come and transfer them to their boat.

SQUIRE. That's the law.

ABE. Seemed kind of silly to me. So one day when a feller was in a hurry to get to the other side and the Dill ferry wasn't waiting in the middle of the river, I poled him clear across to Kentucky.

SQUIRE. What happened?

ABE. The Dill brothers were waiting on the shore kinder mad like. [*He grins.*] Said they were going to teach me a lesson.

SQUIRE. And did they?

ABE. [*Grinning widely.*] What do you reckon? [*He clenches his fist and slides it along the table.*]

SQUIRE. [*Feels the fist.*] You did the teaching.

ABE. But after I got done whupping them, I started teaching myself a lesson. I figgered that Kentucky and Indianny are two different states. What's legal in one may not be legal in the other.

SQUIRE. That's right.

ABE. But the river ain't no state, I figgered. Then it came to me that it was two states, Kentucky and Indianny. The state line runs down the middle. Mighty funny, ain't it, a wet state line?

SQUIRE. You reasoned it out very well.

ABE. So I told the Dill brothers I was in the wrong and offered to let them whup me if they'd a mind to.

SQUIRE. [*Imitating ABE's drawl.*] But I reckon they didn't have the mind to?

ABE. Said they was too busy with other things. [*Gets up and paces around the room.*] Squire, I'm mighty anxious to be a lawyer feller. But one thing bothers me. I ain't had more'n a few months of schooling. Do you reckon I can ever get some-where's?

SQUIRE. [*Standing.*] Abe, nothing is impossible in America. America is a rich, raw country waiting for men like you to take hold. Here in America a man can be anything that he sets his mind on . . . lawyer, postmaster, governor, farmer . . . even president.

ABE. I ain't aiming higher'n the law.

SQUIRE. A man's ambition sets his goal. Hard work is all it takes.

ABE. My father wants me 'o be a carpenter like him. [*As an afterthought.*] He ain't a very good carpenter, neither.

SQUIRE. In the old country, a man can't be much more than his father before him. There, a man is born for the past. But here, in America, a man is born for the future.

ABE. I can dream, then, about what I want to be and it will come true?

SQUIRE. Yes, dream. But read, too, and study. Do all the traveling you can. Notice folks. Study them. Keep preparing yourself

for the destiny that's waiting for you . . . that's waiting for any American boy.

ABE. Then I can be somebody someday . . . ugly as I am.

SQUIRE. I'd say your homeliness was in your favor. You won't waste time running after the girls.

ABE. Maybe I'd like to be a-running after them. Only they won't have me.

SQUIRE. Nonsense. You have lots of character, boy, and that's more important than looks.

ABE. [*With fervent humorousness.*] I hope so. I shore hope so. [*Sound of carriage wheels coming up.*] Listen! [*Pause.*] Carriage wheels!

SQUIRE. Mr. Breckenridge! [*He goes to the door.*] Yes. It's he. [*Wheels stop.*]

BRECKENRIDGE. [*Outside.*] Hello, there!

SQUIRE. Come in, Mr. Breckenridge. Come in, sir. [*He turns and smiles at ABE, who grins back happily.*]

BRECKENRIDGE. [*Enters. He is slender and aristocratic, dressed in well-tailored black broadcloth, with a white ruffled shirt, and wearing a tall bell-shaped beaver hat which he removes as he steps into the room. His voice is low and rich and his diction flawless.*] Ready for the journey, Squire Pate?

SQUIRE. Ready, sir. But first I want you to meet a young friend of mine. He's reading law with me.

ABE. [*Coming forward with hand outstretched.*] Mr. Breckenridge, sir, I he'erd you speak to the jury over to Warwick County in that murder case. And I want to say that if I could make as good a speech as that, my soul would be satisfied.

BRECKENRIDGE. [*Pumping his hand.*] Thank you! Thank you! I hope you will entertain the same pleasant sentiments at the polls next election. I'm running for office, you know.

ABE. I ain't old enough to vote yet.

BRECKENRIDGE. [*Dropping his hand abruptly.*] Oh! [*Turning to SQUIRE PATE.*] The afternoon is getting on, Squire. And I'd like to make Gentryville before nightfall.

ABE. [*Raising his voice.*] But I'll be voting age when you're up for re-election.

BRECKENRIDGE. [*Pleased at the flattery, turns back to ABE.*] Ah, yes! So you liked my speech, Mr. . . . ah . . . Mr. . . .

SQUIRE. Lincoln. Abe Lincoln.

BRECKENRIDGE. Lincoln? I knew of some Lincolns over in North Carolina.

ABE. My folks come from Kentucky. My mother's folks, the Hanks's, settled there when it was just a wilderness.

BRECKENRIDGE. Hanks? Hanks? [*Concentrates.*] Seems like I had access to some court records once on which the name Hanks appeared prominently. I recall . . .

ABE. [*Tensely.*] Don't say it, Mr. Breckenridge. Don't say it.

BRECKENRIDGE. Hanks! Always running afoul of the law and . . .

SQUIRE. [*Puts his hand on his arm and speaks coldly.*] As you mentioned, Mr. Breckenridge, it is getting late and we had best be leaving.

BRECKENRIDGE. [*Puzzled.*] What? [*Looks at ABE.*] Oh! I am genuinely sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you, my boy.

SQUIRE. [*Leading him to door.*] Come on, sir.

BRECKENRIDGE. You'll never get anywhere wearing your heart on your sleeve, son. This is a rough and a tough country. If you want to survive in it, you must be the same. Sensitivity is an enormous handicap. We all have family skeletons rattling around in our closets . . . including myself. And I always say . . .

ABE. Good-bye, Mr. Breckenridge.

BRECKENRIDGE. [*Miffed.*] Humph! Good afternoon, sir. [*He goes.*]

SQUIRE. [*At door.*] I'm leaving my law books for you, Abe.

ABE. Thank'ee for the loan.

SQUIRE. I'm giving them to you. Sort of compensation for . . . things.

ABE. [*Strokes one of the big books with awkward tenderness.*]

I . . . I . . . don't rightly know what to say.

SQUIRE. That's all right. I understand, Abe. Good-bye.

ABE. Good-bye, Squire. [*The SQUIRE goes. ABE picks up one of the books reverently, holds it a moment, and then replaces it. He goes to door, looks out a moment, then closes it. He walks slowly to window and stares out somberly. Then he raises his eyes to the sky.*] Now, Lord, this is a funny time of day to be coming to You. Night time is the time for praying . . . when all the sparrows are done falling and folks are sleeping and You ain't got so much on Your hands. Then You got time to listen to folks. [*Pause.*] Now, I wouldn't come bothering You in the middle of the afternoon less'n it was something special. [*Pause.*] A while back, I heard a great lawyer defend a poor, friendless boy. I thought that was a mighty fine thing. So I done made up my mind to be a great lawyer like him. But this is what's on my mind. I just been talking to Mr. Breckenridge and he started to say something 'gainst my mother's people. Now he didn't know that he was hurting me. He just *couldn't* know. And that brings me 'round to the special thing that I want to take up with You. [*Clasping his hands.*] Oh, Lord! No matter what place in life I am meant to fill, I hope You will always keep me plain and humble so that I always understand how plain folks feel. [*His voice deepens.*] Lord, I ask that I may never be called upon to hurt any man by word . . . or by deed.

#### THE CURTAIN FALLS

#### SCENE IV

TIME: *The following winter.*

SCENE: *The same.*

AT RISE: *It is supper time. A cold wintry rain is falling. The bare branches of the tree outside the window look ice-covered. The fire is burning. There is a candle on the mantelpiece and*

*another on the table.*

MIS' LINCOLN *is cooking a simple supper at the fireplace. TOM is making a bureau. His tools are scattered on the floor, and at the moment he is fitting pieces of a drawer together. MIS' LINCOLN watches him a moment, then speaks.*

MIS' LINCOLN. Tom, we been living in Indianny eleven years now and that's the first thing you turned your hand to making. Seems mighty peculiarsome that you start in now . . . when we're leaving for new country soon's the winter breaks.

TOM. I came into Indianny with nothing. I ain't leaving it with nothing to show.

MIS' LINCOLN. And I suppose that bureau stands for eleven years' work?

TOM. That could be.

MIS' LINCOLN. I like it here. Why do we have to go on to new country?

TOM. When you can hear the sound of your neighbor's shotgun, it's time to be moving.

MIS' LINCOLN. I suppose it will be a good thing for Abe, though. He's read every book within fifty miles. Time we was getting where he can borrow more books.

TOM. Abe's growing up.

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Sighs.*] Yes, he is. [*Pause.*] He'll be a fine man.

TOM. He's tolerable. Good worker . . . when he feels like it. [*Knock on door.*] Now who's that?

MIS' LINCOLN. Come in. [*Door opens and SQUIRE PATE enters. He is dressed in a greatcoat and as he enters he removes his hat and shakes off the raindrops.*] Why, Squire Patel! Howdy!

SQUIRE. Howdy, Mis' Lincoln. [*Shakes hands.*] How are you, Tom?

TOM. [*As he shakes hands.*] Middling . . . considering.

MIS' LINCOLN. Come to the fire and dry off.  
[*He sits near fire.*]

TOM. Ain't seen you in six months.

SQUIRE. The circuit keeps me pretty busy. Don't get down to these parts very often.

TOM. I forgot you was elected judge last election. Don't know how I forgot. I voted for you. [*Puzzled.*] Leastways I think I did.

MIS' LINCOLN. Us folks were all glad you beat out Mr. Breckenridge in the election.

SQUIRE. Breckenridge. That reminds me. I came to see Abe.

MIS' LINCOLN. He'll be home soon.

TOM. He's doing a job of work over to the Romaine farm.

SQUIRE. I been hearing great things about him.

MIS' LINCOLN. Law, yes. Since you last saw him he went clear down to New Orleans and back.

SQUIRE. So I heard.

TOM. Yes, sir. Mr. Gentry had Abe build him a raft and Abe floated down the Mississippi with a raft full of pork, flour, and potatoes. He traded them off for cotton, tobacco, and sugar.

MIS' LINCOLN. And came back on a steamboat!

SQUIRE. Well! Well! He must have seen strange sights on his trip.

MIS' LINCOLN. You just ought to hear him tell of it.

TOM. [*Dryly.*] The Squire will hear.

SQUIRE. Folks tell me you're leaving Indiana, Tom.

TOM. Yup. We got to get out of Indianny on account of the milk sick. Killing off all our cows.

SQUIRE. [*Laughs.*] Why, you been putting up with the milk sick ten years now.

TOM. 'Bout time we did something 'bout it then, ain't it?

MIS' LINCOLN. Never mind Tom, Squire. He's just got a hankering to be up and moving.

SQUIRE. If I were a younger man, I'd move into Illinois with you. Great farming land, they tell me.

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Taking large wooden bowl and some pewter plates from the cupboard.*] Squire, we're about to set down to supper. We'd take it kindly if you'll eat with us. [*She sets table during next speeches, four plates, four forks and four mugs.*]

SQUIRE. I'm very sorry . . . [*Pause.*] But I can't refuse. [*All laugh.*]

MIS' LINCOLN. 'Course it's a mighty plain supper. Just b'iled potatoes. The winter ran on so long and our provisions are most gone.

TOM. The weather's been so sorry-like, I ain't been able to shoot no game.

MIS' LINCOLN. And Abe wouldn't raise a gun to any living animal or bird. He just naturally can't kill anything. [*She removes potatoes from large iron pot and transfers them to wooden bowl.*]

TOM. Set up to the table, Squire.

MIS' LINCOLN. Ain't you going to wait on Abe?

TOM. He'll be 'long.

SQUIRE. Are you sitting down, Mis Lincoln?

MIS' LINCOLN. I'll wait for Abe.

TOM. You'd think she was his real mother the way she favors that boy.

MIS' LINCOLN. Well, in all the time I lived in this house, Abe ain't never said a cross word to me. [*Significantly.*] That's more'n I can say about some Lincolns.

TOM. [*Sheepishly.*] Aw now, Mis' Lincoln.

ABE. [*Opens door and comes in. He is dressed in a fringed deerskin jacket, the same kind of pants, rawhide boots and a tall coonskin hat. He carries a long-handled ax over his left shoulder and a book in his right hand.*] Howdy, Ma. . . . [*Sees the SQUIRE.*] Well! Howdy do, Squire. [*Stands ax in corner of the room and wrings the SQUIRE's hand.*] I'm mighty glad to see you again.

SQUIRE. And I, you.

ABE. [*Patting his book.*] "Life of Washington." [*Places it carefully on mantelpiece.*] Squire, I got a lot of tall tales I want to swap with you.

TOM. [*To SQUIRE.*] I warned you.

ABE. [*Hanging his hat on a peg.*] 'Bout the time I floated down

the great Mississippi on a raft.

TOM. We better eat first. 'Taters don't hold the heat long.

[*All sit at table. TOM spears a potato.*]

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Warningly.*] Tom!

TOM. [*Sheepishly returning potato.*] That's right. I forgot the blessing. [*All bend their heads over their clasped hands.*] Lord God, You been mighty good to us out here in the wilderness. Again You have provided us with a meal. Once more we give You praise and thank you for these blessings. Amen.

ABE. [*Cheerfully, as he peers into the bowl of potatoes.*] I must say these are mighty poor blessings.

SQUIRE. [*As they eat.*] How are you and the law coming along, Abe?

ABE. I done read every law book in Indianny that I could borrow.

SQUIRE. Fine.

ABE. Now, I need me a set of Blackstone's Commentaries. And there ain't a one for a hundred miles around.

SQUIRE. I'm sorry I sold my set when I was elected judge.

ABE. We're moving to Illinoy soon . . . reckon you heard?

TOM. I told him.

ABE. I'll find a set there, I reckon.

SQUIRE. Yes. Illinois is a great state for lawyers.

ABE. 'Course I didn't do much studying time I was floating down the Mississippi.

TOM. [*Groans.*] Here come the stories.

SQUIRE. What did you see floating down that mighty river, Abe?

ABE. [*Leans back and assumes the story-teller's drawl.*] Wal . . . I seen the bones of flatboatmen hidden in the caves along the shore. I heard tell that a breed of men called half-horse, half-alligator bushwackers had killed them and stolen their cargo to sell down the river.

MIS' LINCOLN. They didn't hurt you, Abe?

ABE. [*Doubtfully.*] I don't reckon so. [*Winks at SQUIRE PATE.*]

I come back alive, didn't I?

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Relieved.*] So you did.

SQUIRE. What did you see when you got to New Orleans?

ABE. I seen thousands of boats as far as my eye could reach. There was no way of seeing the water on account of the boats.

MIS' LINCOLN. Tell about the strange sailors.

ABE. I seen English sailormen walking the streets and singing queer rolling songs. And folks said the songs were called chanteys. One of 'em went thisaway. [*Sings offkey.*]

"As I was walking down Paradise Lane,  
Blow, blow, blow the man down."

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Stops him by putting her hand on his arm.*] Abe, I love you dearly. But don't sing. You can't carry a tune.

TOM. As long as you're talking, tell about the gals. [*To the SQUIRE.*] That's the only part that's interesting to me. [*MIS' LINCOLN kicks him under the table.*] Ouch! What you kicking me for, Mis' Lincoln? Ain't this a free country? Ain't I got a right?

MIS' LINCOLN. There's freedom and *freedom*.

TOM. [*Meekly.*] Yes'm.

ABE. I seen lots of gals. I seen Creole gals with dark hair and a husky way of talking.

SQUIRE. You went all the way down to New Orleans and back and saw only bones and boats and sailors and girls?

ABE. [*Somberly.*] No, Squire. I seen something else. [*He broods for a second. All stop eating to listen.*] I seen men . . . black men . . . bought and traded like barnyard stock.

SQUIRE. [*Interested.*] Ah!

ABE. I seen men tied to each other by chains, heading for the big cotton fields. I he'erd the sad songs of the black people and seen their eyes darken with sorrow even while they laughed. I seen traders nail up signs and they spelled out "I offer the highest prices in cash for good and likely Negroes." [*Leaning forward with his hands on the table.*] I seen a boy working on a plantation. He was eighteen and had a light skin. He ran away

and they told me they'd get him back and beat him to death. [*Broodingly.*] I seen them in chains. Yes. I seen them. I he'erd the chains as they stumbled past.

SQUIRE. You've got a lot of things to remember, Abe.

ABE. [*Goes to fireplace. He looks down into the flames as he talks.*] I got a feeling that I'll forget the dead boatmen and all them boats I seen at New Orleans. I reckon I won't remember for long the chanteys that the sailors sang. And I know that the dark-eyed gals will pass as a dream passes. [*Slowly and somberly.*] But the chained men . . . the sad men . . . the bought and the sold men . . . somehow I got a feeling that I'll remember them as long as I live.

#### THE CURTAIN FALLS

#### SCENE V

TIME: *The following spring.*

SCENE: *The same.*

AT RISE: *The sun is streaming in the window. The tree outside the window is in blossom. All the furniture has been removed from the room excepting the large table and the dishes and some of the pans and skillets. The fire has burned out and only ashes are left in the fireplace.*

TOM's gun and ABE's long-handled ax stand side by side in the corner. Three worn books are on the mantelpiece.

MIS' LINCOLN is dressed for leaving, with her bonnet strings tied about her neck and her bonnet hanging down her back. TOM wears a wide-brimmed flat hat and stands in the middle of the room with two feather pillows under his arms, and stares about vaguely.

MIS' LINCOLN. [*As she packs dishes, etc., in basket.*] But what about this table?

TOM. Got no room for it in the wagon. We'll leave it here and I'll build us a new one when we get to Illinoy.

MIS' LINCOLN. We didn't have much when we come into Indianny and I can't say that we're taking much away.

TOM. We got us some money.

MIS' LINCOLN. Not much. Just a hundred and twenty-five dollars for this farm. I don't think Aaron Grigsby gave you a fair price for it.

TOM. You know them Grigsbys. Can't get nothing fair out'n them.

[ABE enters. He stoops to enter the low doorway.]

MIS' LINCOLN. Where you been all morning, Abe?

TOM. Took himself a walk to duck the chores of packing the wagon.

ABE. No. I had a lot of errands to do. Had to go down to Colonel Jones' store.

TOM. Where'd you get money to buy anything with? You holding some of your earnings back from me?

ABE. No, Pa. I made arrangements to make some money along the way.

MIS' LINCOLN. You ain't aimin' to split rails?

ABE. No. I done laid in a little stock of pins and needles and buttons and such-like wimmin things. I aim to peddle them along the way to Illinoy.

TOM. Where did you get . . .

ABE. I didn't use no money. The Colonel give me credit. I'll send him back what the stock cost and keep the profits.

TOM. Us Lincolns is mighty smart.

MIS' LINCOLN. Abe is, anyhow.

TOM. [Sheepishly.] Well . . . er . . . guess I'll load on these pillars. [Goes to door.]

ABE. No room, Pa. Wagon's loaded to the canvas.

TOM. Well, we can set on 'em, then. [As he goes.] Always did want to set myself on a pillar.

MIS' LINCOLN. [As she sweeps the cold ashes into a pile.] What

else you do this morning, Abe?

ABE. I went over to say good-bye to Aaron Grigsby . . . and Lucy.

MIS' LINCOLN. Well, I never! I wouldn't touch that man with a ten-foot pole.

ABE. I didn't want to leave hating nobody. [*He gulps painfully.*] Besides, my sister loved him. I kinda said good-bye for her.

MIS' LINCOLN. I see. [*She gives his arm a pat.*]

ABE. Then I went out to where mother and Sarah was buried and . . . and . . . said good-bye to them.

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Sighs.*] Now that we won't be here to take care of it, the wild vines will run over the grave.

ABE. I took up this little tree. . . . [*He holds it out.*] It was growing next to that big crab apple out there. I want something to take with me . . . something that is part of my mother and Sarah.

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Going to him.*] Be you sorry to leave Indianny, Abe?

ABE. Mighty sorry. But we must move on . . . we must always move on to where things are better.

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Sighs.*] Yes.

ABE. But I wish I didn't have to go.

MIS' LINCOLN. Land o' Goshen, why?

ABE. Sometimes I'm afraid.

MIS' LINCOLN. Shucks! We got us a strong wagon and kinfolk over in Illinoy and . . .

ABE. But I like this wilderness. I feel safe here. Sometimes I get the notion that there's something waiting for me in the outside world and that it's starting to get ready there in Illinoy. And when I get that feeling, I'm afraid.

MIS' LINCOLN. That's just one of your dark moods, son.

ABE. Maybe. [*Goes to window and stares out.*] Mother, when I die, bring me back to Indianny and let me lie near my mother and sister.

MIS' LINCOLN. How you do go on! You'll live long beyond me.

ABE. [*Somberly.*] No, Mother.

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Brightly.*] Besides, you'll be a well-known man when you die. Maybe a judge like Squire Pate. The townsfolk will have the burying of you then.

ABE. No matter where I go, my heart will stay in Indianny.

MIS' LINCOLN. Bless you boy, I know. [*She kisses him tenderly on the cheek. During next speech, wagon wheels begin to fade in softly. Two wagons.*] But you must leave here now. You're most a man growed and must get on in life. There's nothing more for you here. You done read every book within a hundred miles. And you know all the folks in Indianny . . . pretty near. Now you must go on to a new place . . . read different books, get to know new people and find you a place where you can start in being a lawyer like you want. [*Emphatically.*] And Illinoy is that place. [*Wagon wheels come up full and then stop.*] I do declare, the other wagons are here. Tildy and Sally and their men . . . and we not ready. [*Calls.*] Tommy! Tommy! [*TOM comes in.*] Load on this basket. We're ready.

TOM. The other two wagons are here. [*He picks up the basket.*]

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Closing the window.*] I know. I heard them.

TOM. [*Going to door with basket.*] I'll have to load this on one of the other wagons. [*He goes.*]

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Looks around.*] I wonder whether we forgot anything. [*Thinks.*] I reckon not. Anyway it's too late now.

TILDY. [*As she comes through the door with SALLY.*] Mother! [*Runs to her and embraces her. SALLY does the same. Then both girls go to ABE and each kiss him, a girl on either cheek.*]

ABE. Mighty glad you gals are coming along with your husbands.

TILDY. [*Demurely.*] Wouldn't think of leaving without my man.

[*Two men come in. They are the boys who danced with the girls some years back.*]

ABE. Howdy. [*He shakes hands with the men as they return*

*his greeting.]*

TOM. [*Entering.*] Reckon we're all here.

JOHN. [*Enters right behind him.*] Count me in.

MIS' LINCOLN. You coming with us, John?

JOHN. A bunch of us footloose fellers made up a wagon and we're a-going along if you folks don't care.

TOM. Glad to have you, John.

JOHN. We figgered as how maybe we could get us each a good-looking wife in Illinoy. Gals is scarce as hen teeth out here.

MAN. Never mind the gals. There's good black farming land in Illinoy.

SECOND MAN. And that's the main thing.

MIS' LINCOLN. We're all here . . . like at the dance a few years back.

TILDY. No. Sarah ain't here.

SALLY. And Aaron and Lucy Larkin.

TOM. Anyhow, all that's going is here and we might as well start.

MIS' LINCOLN. We'll have a word of prayer 'fore we start out.  
[*The men remove their hats.*]

TOM. You're better at it than I am, Abe.

ABE. [*Joins his hands.*] Oh, Lord God, we are going forth to seek new lands. . . .

OTHERS. Aye, Lord.

ABE. And new ways of living. I reckon we're a mighty restless people, Lord, but we just got to keep on moving. But we are strong and have much faith. . . .

MIS' LINCOLN. Aye, much faith.

ABE. Give us fertile lands in Illinoy. Send the rain and the sun so that our crops will prosper. Keep us always in peace, oh, Lord. Do not be angry with us because we are such a restless people. Always in this great land we seek better ways of living. And we shall go forth again and again . . . our children and our children's children until we find what we seek. For we are a young nation. We are a restless nation. . . . [*Pause.*] We are the

American people.

OTHERS. [*Solemnly.*] Amen.

TOM. [*Worriedly, after a pause.*] Now don't you be holding it against me, Lord, because I'm going to get out of here and hunt a country where the milk-sickness is not. Honestly. It's like to ruined me. Amen.

[*There is a scattering of laughing "amens." The men replace their hats. TILDY's husband swings her around and then lifts her in the air.*]

DENNIS. [*As he sets TILDY on the ground.*] We're a-getting out of Indianny at last.

TOM. You folks start up your wagons. We'll follow along.

SALLY. [*As all but TOM, ABE, and MIS' LINCOLN crowd out of the door.*] Squire Pate said to tell you, Abe, that he'll be a-waiting at the cross roads to bid you good-bye.

SECOND MAN. Hurry up, Sally. [*They are out.*]

TOM. [*Runs his hand over one of the wall logs as MIS' LINCOLN puts her bonnet on.*] I cut this here timber with my own hand, time I brought Nancy Hanks here and the young'uns. [*He sighs.*] Yes. Well. . . . [*Pats the wall.*] Good-bye. [*Picks up his gun.*] We'll be starting now. [*He goes out.*]

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Going to door.*] Come along, Abe.

ABE. [*Stands in the middle of the room, looking around.*] After a bit.

MIS' LINCOLN. A new home's a-waiting for you, son.

ABE. Kentucky, Indianny, Illinoy . . . where is my home?

MIS' LINCOLN. [*Brightly.*] Any place in America is your home.

ABE. I reckon that's right. [*Pause.*] You go 'long, Mother. I'm a-coming.

[*She starts to leave. She stops as if to say something, sighs instead, and then goes out. ABE looks around the room once more, then he picks up the three books, and takes the young tree from the table. He tucks the tree under his left arm. He looks around the room again.*]

TOM. [*From outside.*] Abe! We're waiting on you. [*ABE sighs*

*deeply, his shoulders droop. He goes over to the corner and picks up his ax and adjusts it over his right shoulder. Again TOM calls, jokingly, but a bit impatiently.] Illinoy is a-waiting on you, Abe.*

ABE. I'm coming.

*[Carrying the books and the little tree, and the ax over his shoulder, he looks around the room once more and then leaves the cabin to begin the journey. The sun pours into the room from the open door. But as ABE closes it after him, the sunshine leaves it and the cabin is filled with gloomy shadows.]*

#### THE CURTAIN FALLS

## PRODUCTION NOTES

These PLAYS OF DEMOCRACY are so simple and actable that anyone of teen age or over will have no difficulty in setting the stage for them. Here are plays for many needs: to raise funds, to maintain the morale of people plunged in war activities, to help solve many new problems, as well as for usual Little Theatre and amateur purposes.

*Confab With Crockett, Moonset, The Cave* are especially good for army, navy, and other all-male casts; *A Visit from Aunt Harriet, Ceiling* are suitable for OCD and all home-front activities. Here are plays of three characters and plays of more than twenty characters, all touching on some problem of democracy today, and no matter what the politics or religion of a producing group may be, or if it lacks an orthodox politics and religion, there is still a play here to believe in.

Whether these plays are staged realistically or with curtains or on a bare platform is relatively unimportant, for they are plays with a purpose, and what does matter is that they be produced with spirit. Only the play, *Ceiling*, which calls for some sort of suggested or real ceiling "drop," would lose point if presented on a bare platform.

But if an acting group enjoys realistic presentations especially, here are opportunities for backgrounds and properties from the early days of the Quakers to World War II. Only *The Ballad of Valley Forge* would lose some of its poetic value with too realistic an interpretation.

Others, for instance *Confab With Crockett*, might well combine the realistic with the imaginative, so that the audience would look upward to a high-lighted mountain top, where Crockett appears in person before a radio "loud speaker." In fact, all of the plays can be done effectively with a few realistic

properties arranged before whatever background is most readily obtainable. Even plays which designate changes of scene can be blacked out or explained. The amateur stage is happily achieving an informality in these matters which speaks well for the fact that "the play's the thing." Choose the play which suits the "cause" best and disregard the age of realism that plagues the professional theatre.

Costumes are not always necessary either, unless their use is desirable to add historical knowledge or educational importance to some occasion. Anyone who has seen a skillful impersonator take on different characteristics with a scarf or a cocked hat knows that illusion is a creative rather than a realistic quality.

Some of these plays have modest royalty charges and others are royalty-free. An entire evening's entertainment can be arranged at small cost, and any two of them—or *Young Lincoln* alone—may be presented in schools for less than the cost of the usual assembly program.

Casting, however, is always important whether a play is produced realistically or imaginatively, and so here are a few basic suggestions. I have always found it best, when casting young people—and even those not quite so young—to suit the play to the talents of the available persons rather than to expect an abundance of ability from anyone. In professional circles this is called "type-casting," and it is frowned on because it limits the actors' opportunity to progress. But in amateur dramatics it usually creates opportunity for those who would not otherwise be suspected of having acting talent. A number of plays in this volume include juniors in the cast, *Johnny's Little Lamb*, *Henry Wallace's Experiment*, *Young Lincoln*. These parts will be sympathetic ones for juniors to play. There are others, however, which call for historical characters, and therefore more rehearsing, even when players are cast with discretion.

Type-casting often places on the director the responsibility

of giving a few of the group private instructions. Because of a lack of stage experience, some people will move too freely or without dramatic emphasis; they can be so at ease with their parts or so sincere in their interpretations that their actions do not "cross the footlights." The director must step in and explain that the size of the auditorium and the distance between the audience and the actors creates a kind of perspective which all players must bridge if the production is to be good.

The rehearsals themselves need to be intelligently planned if players have had little experience. The director must see that every one really understands his or her part, and it is not satisfactory merely to announce those selected for the cast and issue instructions that parts must be memorized. The director should call together the entire cast and read the play to them, allowing plenty of time at the conclusion of the reading for questions from the group relating to the interpretation of the play as a whole and each part of it. Even then the different parts should not be memorized.

It is awkward, of course, to have to run through numerous rehearsals while players are turning the pages of scripts, but the relationship of the players to each other must be kept fluid until the meaning of every speech has been satisfactorily developed. Hints from the director as to what the player is really thinking during each speech—and especially while others are talking—are also necessary.

In fact, these early rehearsals may show that some speeches need to be changed or cut entirely, for there is no sense in forcing an amateur to deliver a sentence which for one reason or another sticks in his throat. There are always small phrases or words, sometimes complete paragraphs, which simply do not suit the moment, and these obstructions must be removed if actors are to feel at ease. Even the language of the author should not be a holy thing that one fears to violate; it is good stage speech only so long as it is said in the best possible way.

But after the play and the cast have been chosen, the fun

should begin. If everybody is happy and works hard, much will be done to create that vitality without which no play anywhere deserves or receives honors. Certainly a "play of democracy" must convey something of the good will of the group which produces it, for democracy begins on the home-front.







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